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The present work presents a comprehensive and analytical study of the origin and evolution of the Sikh religious ethos and also the emergence of the Sikh community on a broad canvas covering religious as well as socio-political contours of thought of Guru Nanak and the first four successor Gurus.

Providing a fresh perspective about the distinctive ideological basis and dynamic character of the Sikh faith, the author has underscored that Guru Nanak's genius lay specifically in integrating the contemporary Bhakti-sufi tradition of spiritual quest with the socio-political milieu in the totality of medieval Indian life. Through Guru Nanak, the Bhakti movement in Punjab became a vehicle for social change and it was the intensity and depth of his spirituo-socio-political message, fortified and consolidated by successor Gurus that served as an edifice on which the super structure of Sikhism was built.

Dr. Puri has grappled with many crucial and vital issues in this erudite volume and has focussed, inter-alia, on the politically-educative values, albeit nebulous or incipient, in the Sikh religious ethos. The central theme emerging from this penetrating study is that the essence of Nanak's religion consists in its being a force for emancipating mankind from all religious and social shackles. Guru Nanak consciously projected new goals, envisaging a socio-political order based on the concept of universal brotherhood, social justice, and humanitarian cultural vision that would engender peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding through explicit acceptance of cultural pluralism. And herein lies the relevance of Nanak's message in the present context and significance of his approach which aims at linking all aspects of human activity, including that in social and political arenas, with the concept of 'Dharma'.

The study would help in probing the genesis of Sikhism and the values it has stood for, and will also inspire others to take up still further research in this direction.

Advent of Sikh Religion

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To My Beloved
Anil

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Preface

The advent of Sikh religion represents a well marked and decisive development in the evolution of Indian religious consciousness. Guru Nanak, the founder of this religion and the chief exponent of the Bhakti movement in Punjab, appeared in the midst of several powerful religious currents related to the Bhakti cult. While he was, quite naturally, influenced by them and, in certain respects, his ideology has strong affinity with that of the Nirguna Bhakti cult of medieval India, he made a number of departures and formulated a specific and well defined religious ethos that extended far beyond his own times into the future. Though essentially the founder of a new faith, Guru Nanak was a prophet of singularly unique charisma, a saint in action, who saw much beyond religious and intellectual cognitions and aimed at arousing the conscience of man in society and polity as well. He underscored the spiritual foundations of human existence and, through his utterances, Guru Nanak ushered in an era of spiritual and social awakening with far-reaching results.

The origin and evolution of Sikh religious ethos as also the emergence of Sikh community as a distinct socio-political phenomenon has evoked considerable scholarly attention by historians and Indologists. Much has been written about Guru Nanak and the Sikh movement in the fields of Indian history, philosophy, religion, literature and sociology. The year of Guru Nanak's quincentenary birth celebrations i.e. 1969, in particular, evolved considerable interest and intensive research on various facets of Nanak's religion and the community it gave birth to. During the last two decades or so, sociological surveys by the universities in Punjab and individual efforts by historians like Prof. Gopal Singh, Prof. J.S. Grewal, Prof. Harbans Singh, Prof. Fauja Singh, Prof. Niharranjan Ray and Western historians like W.H. McLeod, Owen Cole and others have thrown considerable light on the nature of the Sikh movement and its impact. Prof. J.S. Grewal's work *Guru Nanak in History* constitutes a major contribution to the study of Guru Nanak's role and the legacy he

bequeathed to his successors. W.H. McLeod's book *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* remains the most distinguished Western exposition of Sikh theology. The works of the aforesaid scholars, apart from having made valuable contribution to the study of Nanak's religion, have also inspired many others to take up the subject either in continuation of where they left or to explore newer avenues of the significance of Guru Nanak's thought.

Notwithstanding the fact that voluminous literature has been produced both by Indian and Western scholars on several aspects of Sikhism, there still exists a significant lag in so far as an integrated and comprehensive study focussing on the subject of socio-political dimensions of Sikhism during the sixteenth century and the emergence of the Sikh *panth* with a distinct social identity of its own has not been explored fully and much remains to be done in this context. Looked at from a historical angle, a study of socio-political context of the teachings of the Sikh Gurus is of particular ideological interest. Infact, a purely theological characterisation of the movement, based on a circumscribed approach, has obscured the broad social understanding and role of the Sikh Gurus which could well place the precepts of the Sikh religion at the centre of all discussions and deliberations for an equitable world social order today. A fact of crucial importance is that, apart from his role as a religious reformer, there are a myriad other aspects of Nanak's aproach which involved a deep observation and analysis of the problems discernible in the contemporary social and political spectrum. While cultivation of inner spiritually claimed his primary attention and he regarded 'Dharma' as the saviour and prop of man, existential problems were as much Nanak's concern as those of the spirit. He did not see religion in isolation from its applied aspect, and the uplift of man as well as society occupied a crucial place in his scheme of things. Guru Nanak applied the essence of religion to the problems of the day and sought the solutions to the latter within the parameters of the former. Nanak in fact took a comprehensive view of man's multifarious faculties and social responsibilities, laid equal emphasis on the three spheres of life viz., religion, society and polity, and sought to invest their virtues conjointly in a single body of faith and conduct. Consequently, apart from being a protest against the orthodox Brahmanical set up of the society and religion, Nanak's faith aimed, more importantly, at integrating the contemporary Bhakti-Sufi tradition of spiritual quest with the socio-political milieu in the totality of medieval Indian life.

The present work brings out, on the one hand, the dynamic character of Sikhism against the broad historical perspective of contemporary Bhakti movement in medieval India and, on the other, attempts a probe of specific aspects like the socio-political contours of the teachings of Guru Nanak and his first four successors which formed the edifice on which the superstructure of Sikhism was built. The aim is to provide a

wide and rational expanse with a view to comprehending, in their proper perspective, the various developments affecting the Sikh movement during the initial and subsequent stages of its growth. The subject has been dealt with broadly under the headings: (a) Religious environment of Punjab before the advent of Guru Nanak, (b) Guru Nanak and the foundation of Sikh religion, (c) Guru Nanak *vis-à-vis* the Bhakti movement, (d) Contemporary society and the social message of Nanak, (e) Social dimensions of the Sikh *panth* in the sixteenth century under the first four successor Gurus, and (f) Political ramifications of the Sikh movement under the first five Sikh gurus.

The first chapter deals with the diverse contemporary religious phenomena, the mystic trends, nature and influence of Hinduism, yogic traditions, Islam and Sufism in Punjab. The yogis have been dealt with in some detail, as Guru Nanak himself displayed a greater awareness of their degenerating influence on the socio-religious life of Punjab than that of any other sect. A very interesting and important aspect of the religious milieu of Nanak that is assessed in this chapter, is the process of interaction and cross fertilization of the mystic ideas of the Sufis and the yogis in Punjab. The religious scene that necessitated the commissioning of Guru Nanak's lofty mission, presented a desperate situation. A study of Nanak's *banis* reveals the passions of a man highly sensitive to the contemporary socio-religious environment and who was convinced that the social institutions of both Hindus and Muslims through which their religions worked had ceased to provide for spiritualism, self-preservation, continued evaluation and reconstruction.

The second chapter "Guru Nanak and the foundation of Sikh Panth" explores the nature of Nanak's divine revelations, the key concepts of his teachings in their theological and metaphysical parameters, his reaction to Hindu ritualism, the hypocrisy and authoritarian hold of the priestly class as also the pretensions of Nath Jogis to occult powers. The nature and mode of Bhakti i.e. devotion, in Nanak's teachings as also its divergence from the medieval Vaishnava Bhakti tradition has been brought out. There is denunciation by Guru Nanak of certain forms of religious beliefs and practices of Vaishnava Bhaktas, Nathas, Muslim ritualism and also of some Sufis. Taking a complete cognizance of the situation and, with a sense of full awareness, Nanak delegitimised the contemporary religious phenomenon and embarked on a religious reformation of society by suggesting remedial measures which had in them the seeds of a new religion and social order.

While evaluating Guru Nanak's ideology and teachings, I have particularly taken note of the fact that the essence of Sikh religion consists in its being a force for emancipating mankind from all religious and social evils. The nature of communion which the pioneers of spiritual faiths have generally held out is, most often, mystical, born of the inner

illumination of the spirit. In the case of Guru Nanak too, it has to be admitted that the source of his beliefs was his mystical experience. Nanak appears to have had divine mandate and looks upon his compositions as divinely inspired. However, where he stands apart from other mystics is that what he imparts through his teachings is not what can be termed as an exclusively mystic creed. Guru Nanak does not just give us a metaphysical-mystical philosophy or a scholastic vision but a prophecy, an entire conduct of life in which belief, thought and social action are in harmony. Sikh faith is not an academic system but a way of life and can play vital role in spiritual and secular pursuits. Based upon the monotheistic teachings of the ten Sikh Gurus and upon the authority of sacred writings in the *Adi Granth*, the Sikh ethos aims at overcoming of certain negative propensities, and at cultivation of positive attributes in individual behaviour, making man more relevant and meaningful to society. In Guru Nanak's faith there is no contradiction between acknowledgement of the Eternal and acceptance of physical reality. The correlation of transcendental and the phenomenal self implies, at the sociological level, the active unity of the spiritual and the societal aspects of man whereby society becomes a means or a field for cultivalion of creative values. Wide humanism constitutes an integral part of Guru Nanak's ethical vision. Even though God remained the first and the last word in Guru Nanak's hymns, his teachings, in the final analysis, are meant to serve as instruments of human welfare and social justice and presuppose a concept of society which is progressive and dynamic.

Since Guru Nanak appeared as a religious leader in Punjab, a region which had confronted and assimilated some Islamic influences, many historians have ventured to declare that the influence of Islam on Nanak was conspicuously high and he derived much of his belief from Islam. Such a feeling is likely to arise in the context of any discussions concerning the antecedents and their likely influences because a reformer works within a given environment whose impact cannot be denied, much less ignored. To that extent, Sikhism has not been immune from getting affected and its acquiring a perceptible affinity with some postulates and terminologies of Islam and Sufism. However, our main thrust is to show that fundamentally in its orientation Sikhism remains original and independent in relation to Islam and Hinduism. I have also rejected the theory of syncretic origin of Nanak's faith because such a fallacy is the result of the initial error committed by some Indian scholars and Western Indologists and appeared to arise from only a superficial and not a deep study of the original scriptural writings of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Nanak's religious vision is not an aggregate of the existing Hindu or Muslim traditions but a phenomenon which encompasses much more and is characterised by vigour and represents an independent faith based on the intuitional feelings of the founder of the movement and the divine

revelations received by him. The Sikh Gurus and their scriptures as also the writings of Bhai Gurdas have repeatedly affirmed the distinct identity of Sikh faith in contradistinction to both Hinduism and Islam and not in continuity or an offshoot of either. Yet, though Sikh religion did not involve any synthesisation, it is even more significant, as succinctly brought out in this volume, that the teachings of the Sikh Gurus were not conceived for a particular community of their followers; rather, Guru Nanak was pointing towards a new socio-religious culture, urging all to search for that spiritually vital core which lay beyond particularism of Islam and Hinduism. The Sikh Gurus projected a vision of common humanity, a vision which would overcome the barriers and discriminations based on ethnic or racial differences. Guru Nanak wanted to prevent religious authority from becoming a source of sectarianism. The spirit of mutual accommodation and reconciliation of different religions and communities is the key note of his philosophy. Infact while retaining its distinctive identity, Sikhism aspires towards a universality of spirit and a humanitarian cultural vision that would engender peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding through explicit acceptance of cultural pluralism.

A matter of crucial significance that has been dealt with in the present text is the assessment of precise kind of relationship in which Guru Nanak stood among other medieval *bhaktas*. Guru Nanak was the product of the medieval Bhakti movement and, in certain respects, his ideology has strong affinity with that of its most prominent exponent, Kabir, who nourished the sant tradition. The Sikh Gurus by granting Kabir a place in the *Adi Granth* have affirmed the links of Sikh faith with the sant tradition. But that is not to suggest that Guru Nanak was merely repeating what he had inherited, and the inclusion of Kabir's utterances in the *Granth Sahib* is not an *ipso facto* proof of an absolute identity of the moods and motivations of the two expressions of Bhakti movement led by Kabir and Nanak respectively. By establishing a link between Nirguna *bhaktas* like Kabir, Raidas, Dadu and Nanak, many Indian and Western scholars sought to describe and identify the whole phenomenon of Sikh movement as being identical with that of Nirguna Bhakti tradition. In this they have, curiously enough, ignored and even failed to underline, much less appreciate, the distinctive ideological basis and socio-political context of Guru Nanak's movement. This is all the more untenable considering the fact that whereas most of the other contemporaneous expressions of the medieval Bhakti movement in various parts of India were in time to come absorbed by the orthodox stream of Hinduism, it was only the Sikh movement of Guru Nanak that developed as an autonomous faith and which still retains a great deal of its original vitality and dynamism. In this context I have endeavoured to project that even while the message of Nanak might have been of Hindu extraction and he might have received immediate inspiration from some of the progressive

trends of Nirguna tradition of 'dissent and protest' and also influenced by Kabir, yet he brought about a coherent and systematic reorientation of Sant beliefs, and imparted specific socio-political dimensions to the Bhakti movement in Punjab.

What distinguished Guru Nanak from other saints was his practical outlook backed by positive action. The Nirguna saints too had emphasised equality, fraternity, compassion, humanism and there was a concern for social justice for the downtrodden and they condemned those officials who were induldging in gross irregularities and harassing the general public. But while the saints showed a deep insight into what was corroding the Hindu society, they did not challenge the existing class structure or social set up. The social impact of their teachings tended not to envisage major structural changes but rather modifications and adjustments within the framework of Hindu Varnashrama-dharma and the Brahmanical orthodoxy. Whatever be the radical parameters of the social ideology of the Nirguna saints, they fell short of projecting and effecting a social transformation or causing a dent in the citadel of Hindu orthodoxy. It was only the Sikh movement initiated by Guru Nanak which effected major changes in and demarcations from the environing Hindu society and religion and what finally emerged from his message and mission was a distinct faith and not a sect within the fold of Hinduism. Guru Nanak sought to organise a new society and build a new order on principles of justice and equality as alternative norms to caste or creed. Through his teachings, the Bhakti movement in Punjab became a vehicle for social change and it was the intensity and depth of his message not only on the spiritual but also on the socio-political plane that served as an edifice for the evolution of the Sikh *panth*. Among the *bhaktas* it was Guru Nanak who consolidated the heritage of dissent and protest into a coherent system by transforming it into a self-sufficient code of spiritual and temporal obligations.

Guru Nanak's social vision, like his metaphysical vision, was comprehensive in nature, taking within its ambit the totality of society. His verses bear an eloquent testimony to his concern at social discriminations, miscarriage of justice, evils of Brahmanical domination, cowardice of people and many other evils of the contemporary society. The social philosophy of Guru Nanak aimed at a basic transformation and, for this purpose, he struck at the roots of the social system and provided do's and don'ts for his followers. Rejection of caste and a breakaway from the caste system constituted the most fundamental departure which Guru Nanak made from the established social order of Hindu Varnashrama-dharma. He was convinced that no spiritual and social progress could take place in a system of privileges which confirmed the monopoly of the higher castes and exploitation of the so called lower castes. There are numerous pronouncements by Guru Nanak and the successor Gurus,

repudiating the 'ethical' validity of caste, affirming equality of human beings before God and projecting deeds rather than caste as the determining factor for one's status. Further, it is not the metaphysical utterances alone but the practical steps taken by Guru Nanak for the abolition of the caste which provided a framework for a vigorous egalitarian society through the creation of institutions like *langar, sangat* and *pangat* which constitute the original nucleus of the Sikh *panth* and have been operating ever since their inception. In Sikh *sangats,* low castes fraternised without any discrimination with other members drawn from amongst Khatris, Jats and other classes. Guru Nanak had conceived the community of his followers as forming a classless society and it cannot be denied that, by and large, the expanding Sikh *panth* remained committed to his ideology. Here it may, however, be mentioned that no social movement, howsoever strong it may be, can remain totally unaffected for long by its environmental limitations and since the overall objective reality in the country remained what it was, a few pernicious elements of the caste system reappeared among the Sikhs subsequently. Even so it may be reasonably conceded that none of the medieval religious saints who spoke against the caste distinctions were able to achieve corrective results to the extent that Nanak did. The Sikh *panth* is non-caste in theory and thus rejects the standard definition of Hindu Varnashrama-dharma and the obligations associated with a particular caste identity; the stress is on sure foundation of social justice and harmony. Guru Nanak's rejection of social discriminations was further complimented by his affirmation of equality for women and his concept of society was free from taboos and prejudices born out of sex. Infact Nanak stood out, in his own time, as a staunch advocate of women's proper place in society. It is, however, necessary to clarify that Nanak's concept of equality of sexes did not mean freedom for women in the sense it is projected by some in modern times. The image of ideal womanhood emerging from Nanak's teachings is not unconventional but this does not detract from the fact that in the context of medieval India, Guru Nanak envisaged a revolutionary transformation of woman's status in which she was not only not inferior to man but had equal status and responsibility before God. In sum, Guru Nanak had consciously projected new goals, before the people, establishing an order on the basis of equality, truth, morality, honest creative manual labour for earning one's livelihood, dislike for parasitic existence, faith in divine social justice and Guru Nanak seems to be in favour of a system in which each individual, whether high or low, was enabled to work with due regard for collective need. Thus over and above being a mystic Guru Nanak was the harbinger of a new social order, anticipating an egalitarian society, denouncing religious bigotry, caste taboos and social discrimination. He unleashed a dynamic upsurge for amelioration of man and society. As a result of his teachings and the organisational steps initiated by him a

new brotherhood came into existence, which inspired by his radicalism exhibited a progessive social outlook.

The object of this work, as initially undertaken, was to examine the social and political impact of the Bhakti movement in Punjab under Guru Nanak. However, the wide range of research undertaken in this context revealed that the interest of a comprehensive analysis would be better served by extending the scope of our study from the first to the fifth Sikh Guru. This was deemed necessary because the period of four successor Gurus (AD 1539-1606) from Guru Angad to Guru Arjun, fifth in the line of succession, witnessed the crystallisation of seminal ideas propounded by Guru Nanak. Chapter 5 of this book therefore, provides a detailed assessment of the social dimensions of the Sikh faith and *panth* under the first four successor Gurus. Sikhism, though founded and consecrated by Guru Nanak, saw further systematisation of its beliefs and organisational consolidation in the next generation of successor Gurus. The rudimentary institutional framework carved out by Guru Nanak for his faith was by itself a unique and original feature, but the secular and institutional dimensions imparted to his message under the successor four Gurus were no less responsible for providing a distinctiveness to the Sikh *panth* within the broad framework of the medieval Bhakti milieu. Permanence, consolidation and distinctiveness were some of the characteristic features of the line of action taken by the early Gurus and, during the first century of its evolution, the Sikh faith and community not only gradually detached itself from the social taboos of Hindu Varnashrama-dharma and the ritualistic restriction of the orthodox Brahmanical religion but also developed a more formalised organisational structure imparting it a definite shape and panthic identity quite distinct from the Hindu Brahmanical society on the one hand and Muslim socio-cultural and political phenomenon on the other. As a matter of fact by the time of fifth Guru, Guru Arjun, there was a crystallisation of an organic system of functional relationship of which the unique institution and the charismatic leadership of the Guru, the *panth*, the *granth*, the Harmandir and the development of Amritsar as a nucleus of Sikh activity were the decisive landmarks. Guru-ship and *Granth Sahib*, in particular, gave the Sikhs common focal points of symbolic unity with obedience to both being regarded as a spiritual duty. Moreover, the emergence of Amritsar as a great trading centre, patronage of the Gurus to the commercial activities of the Khatris, mobilisation of financial resources through the *masands*, added to the financial stability which in turn strengthened the cohesion and solidarity of the *panth*. Further, a religious ethos nurtured by a distinct mode of congregational worship viz. *satsang*, a distinct linguistic base i.e. Gurmukhi, new social ceremonies and centres of pilgrimage, consciousness of comradeship in faith, the strong allegiance of followers to the Guru , the twin institutions of *sangat* and *langar*, the unicaste constituency of the

panth—all these had conferred on the Sikhs an identity of their own with a self-determination and confidence, inspired to meet any challenge to their faith and yet adhering steadfastedly to their strongly ethical and devotional manner of living.

Apart from fully taking into account and analysing the various aspects of the Sikh Gurus' religio-social approach, an important content of the present work is its assessment of the political dimensions of the teachings of Guru Nanak and the first four successor Gurus. Diverse views have been expressed earlier by various scholars on the subject. They broadly fall in three categories viz., those holding the movement to be exclusively religious, those staking a claim to its being essentially a political one, and those who while holding the movement to be essentially religious, yet preceive in it the existence of certain elements, both ideological and organisational, which paved the way and also prepared the Sikhs for taking up cudgels against possible onslaughts on their faith.

Our line of approach in the present work involved (i) a logical scrutiny of the arguments advanced by various scholars in support of their respective hypotheses and (ii) an objective study and analysis of such of the aspects of the basic philosophy of Guru Nanak and his immediate successors as may reasonably be deemed to have had some impact on the thinking of their followers in relation to the contemporary political problems, condition their mind and approach in tackling them and, in the process, impinge on the politics of the day. Following this, an attempt has been made to derive inferences in regard to the political ramifications of the teachings and approach of the first five Gurus, based strictly on the observations and sayings of the Gurus and on an objective study of the historical developments. In this context it has also been found necessary to undertake an analytical probe into certain developments during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries i.e. from the time of Sixth Guru onwards in order to resolve another crucial issue as to whether the defensive-cum-militarist response of the sixth and tenth Gurus was a departure from the teachings of the five Sikh Gurus or whether there existed an undercurrent of spiritual oneness and continuation of the teachings of Guru Nanak and their application to the changed circumstances and situations. In the same context, I have also considered it imperative to sort out the two crucial issues relating to the question of (i) spiritualism *vis-à-vis* socio-political concerns and (ii) spiritualism *vis-à-vis* militarism, i.e., the need for use of force under certain specific conditions. An erroneous and biased stance on these two issues has been considerably responsible for some of the existing controversies about the nature of the Sikh movement. Many scholars who have made the simplistic assumption that Guru Nanak's mission was the same as that of the *bhaktas*, find the institutional consolidation, socio-political objectives and the military struggle of the sixth and tenth Sikh Gurus quite unexplicable and regard

the shift of *panth* to militancy as an abrupt change which according to them undermined the spiritual greatness of Nanak's message. These interpretations contradistinguish the so called introvert religio-moral precepts of Guru Nanak from the extrovert socio-political paraxis of Guru Gobind Singh thus posing one against the other with the explicit motive of proving that the subsequent Sikh movement diverges from its original Bhakti marga laid by Guru Nanak.

The upshot of my assessment in this context is that the evolution of the Sikh *panth* under the sixth and tenth Gurus was a continually evolving process, as a flowering of the seed inherent in Guru Nanak's doctrine and not a divergence, as claimed by many scholars who have tended to ignore the role of Sikh ideology as a cementing and directive force. The spiritual heritage of the Sikhs as decended through he message of Guru Nanak had always been characterised by a world view which could turn them into crusaders and martyrs for causes where issues of conscience and justice were involved. An attack on *dharma* is an attack on justice and moral order in general and the ideology of Nanak explicitly left room for responding to the aggression as heroic struggle. This was indeed his vision and it subsequently found vindication both in the conviction and practice of his followers and of which resistance to the tyranny and injustice of the rulers in the seventeenth century constituted a logical course of action. There is considerable basis and proof available to discern an undercurrent of spiritual oneness and continuation between the teachings of Guru Nanak and the course adopted by the sixth and tenth Gurus for the defence of their faith. In this context, the present work is expected to enable one to appreciate the fact that religion and change in a progressive direction on the socio-political plane, are not mutually antagonist and that a protestant movement the like of which Guru Nanak initiated and his successors consolidated could be a source of change and progress and provide a solid base for an organised community and effective body-politic. I have also tried to project the politically educative values, albeit nebulous or incipient, in the teachings of Guru Nanak as also of his four immediate successors who upheld, enlarged upon and disseminated his teachings. It would be apt to record that ultimately it is not the greatness of a founder of a faith that matters but how much of what he preached has become the way of life of his followers. To that extent it is a tribute to Guru Nanak that his message, which was based on the rejection of formalism and feudalistic values, coupled with the stance that philosophical enquiries are necessary for preparing the mind suitably towards the acceptance of an ideal socio-religious discipline, was destined to live through the centuries and provide an inspiration to the Sikh community established by him.

This book is an extension of my doctoral thesis entitled "Socio-Political Dimensions of the Bhakti Movement in Punjab under the First

Five Sikh Gurus" which was submitted to the University of Delhi in 1986. Though some of the key ideas presented here are the same as projected in that thesis, a considerable part of the present work is the result of fresh and additional study both in India and abroad. The research work was made possible by an award of Long Term Teachers' Fellowship by the University Grants Commission. During the research for Ph.D. and extended study, I explored extensive research material, both original and secondary. Among the primary sources are the *banis* of Gurus in the *Adi Granth*, *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, *Janam Sakhis*, *Mahima Prakash* by Sarup Das Bhalla, *Suraj Prakash* by Santokh Singh and *Bansavalinama* by Kesar Singh Chibbar. Prominent among the Persian sources is *Dabistan-i-Mezahib* by Mohsin Fani. There are references to Guru Arjun in *Akbar Nama* and *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*. I had the benefit of being nominated by the University Grants Commission as a research fellow to the United Kingdom for collection of source materials for this project. During my stay in England, I consulted some rare historical literature on Sikhism, both published and unpublished theses, and relevant research materials on the medieval Bhakti movement with special reference to Sikhism. It is sincerely hoped that the present treatise in which a humble attempt has been made to present a comprehensive study of entire gamut of the Bhakti movement in Punjab with reference to the socio-political dimensions of the teachings of first five Sikh Gurus, and of organisational and institutional consolidation of the Sikh faith and *panth*, would help in probing the genesis of Guru Nanak's faith and the values and aims it has stood for, and will also inspire others to take up still further research on the subject.

I wish to place on record my sincere gratitude to late Dr. Krishna Sharma under whose guidance I did my initial research. I am also indebted to several scholars for having provided me with the benefit of their views during discussions with them on various occasions during the period of research and thereafter. Noteworthy among them are Prof. Nural Hasan, Prof. Satish Chandra, Prof. J.S. Grewal, Prof. A.R. Kulkarni, Prof. Indu Banga, Khushwant Singh, Dr. Mohinder Singh, Prof. Attar Singh, Prof. Amrik Singh and late Prof. Fauja Singh. In particular, I am grateful to Prof. H.C. Verma of Department of History, Delhi University, Dr. Dilbagh Singh of Jawaharlal Nehru University and Dr. S.M. Luthra, former Principal, Lady Shri Ram College for Women, for their help and encouragement in pursuit of this research work.

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Sunita Puri

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9 December 1992

1

Religious Environment in Punjab Before the Advent of Guru Nanak

A study of the significance of any movement—religious, social or political—necessarily involves a probe into the particular milieu in which that movement originates, because environment has much to do with the conditioning and moulding of outlook and ideas of its founder. The religious ideas and the rational outlook of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith and the socio-political implications of the Bhakti movement in the Punjab can be properly understood and projected by taking cognizance of the complexity of the Indian religious environment in which he conceived his ideas and applied them to the existing situation. The atmosphere in which the Sikh faith emerged and evolved was marked by socio-religious decadence on the one hand and the interplay of protestant movements of the Bhaktas, the Siddhas and the Sufis on the other. Guru Nanak perceived fully the prevailing plurality and diversity of religious traditions and seemed to have learnt a great deal of theology, metaphysics and social ethics of the times from discussions and disputations. Though influenced by the mystical movements of Bhaktas and Sufis, he imparted a unique rationalism and coherence to Sikhism and in due course of time his message acquired a distinct individuality as a new religious expression.

The evaluation and study of the Bhakti movement in the Punjab, as initiated by Guru Nanak and consolidated by the successor Gurus, has necessarily to be undertaken in the background of the Islamic influence and antecedents in the historical setting of the Punjab. This is particularly relevant because the locale of the Sikh Gurus was also the region of the Punjab, 'the land of five rivers', where for a period of well over three centuries and a half, the ruling authorities and the social elite were Muslims. Islam was too strong and definite a religion to be submerged and absorbed by the indigenous Hindu faith, both socially and religiously. The differences between the socio-religious traditions of Islam and Hinduism were deep and many. It has been observed that

"the religio-cultural forces of Islam represented the very antithesis of Hinduism."[1] Islam is a revealed and prophetic religion. It aims at doctrinally, creating an egalitarian community and within that community *(Ummah)* of the faithful, a sense of cohesion and consciousness is fostered by emphasising not only on one God (Allah) but also the acceptance of a single Prophet, Mohammad, and one scripture, the *Quran.* Hinduism diverges from Islam in all its foregoing particulars, the emphasis being on more than one deity, notwithstanding the concept of Advaitavada, and scriptures; the Hindu code of socio-religious rituals was also far more complex. Even so, it cannot be denied that Hinduism has all along been highly assimilative. The early stages of interaction between Islam and Hinduism were marked by reconciliation as well as confrontation between the indigenous, primarily Hindu civilization of India and the exogenous and rapidly expanding culture of Islam. From the eleventh century onwards, Punjab came face to face with a new religious force backed by military strength. As compared to other parts of India, "both geographically and geopolitically, Punjab perhaps experienced the marked influence of Islam and Muslim domination"[2] and the "impact of Islam in all its aspects—military, political, religious and social—fell most powerfully in the Punjab."[3] The relative simplicity of the Islamic mode of worship, its much less intricate theology and the democratic pattern of socio-religious behaviour were some of the factors bound to impress at any rate those who were sensitive enough to perceive the significance of new developments. The advent of Islam in the Punjab contributed considerably to the toning down of the rigours of Hindu exclusiveness. In other words, the extensive and intensive impact of the Muslim conquest had resulted in undermining the hold of orthodoxy and ushering in an era of comparatively liberal atmosphere in the Punjab.

Thus the historical setting of Punjab in which Sikhism was born and which moulded the nature of its evolution, was determined by the operation of two distinct religious traditions and cultural patterns represented by Hinduism and Islam. Conflicts and modifications which the two religious systems underwent as a result of mutual contact, constituted, by far, the most significant steps towards accommodation between the societies they demarcated. In the domain of religion, considerable interaction took place between Hinduism and Islam, especially within the mystical movements known as Bhakti and Sufism.

[1]W.F. Thomas, *Mutual Influence of Muhammedans and Hindus in India*, p. 19.

[2]Niharranjan Ray, *The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society: A Study in Social Analysis*, p. 3.

[3]A.C. Banerjee, *Guru Nanak and His Times*, p. 30.

The Muslim *pirs* and Hindu *bhaktas* shared many common ideas (love for God and humanity was a theme common to both) though they expressed them differently, conditioned as they were by their respective religious traditions. According to W. Cantwell Smith, "Some would say that the two developments were parallel but they were two facets of one single movement in India during medieval centuries called Bhakti in Hindu form and Sufi in its Islamic."[1] Both the movements were anti-tradition and sought, in general, to do away with the orthodoxy and formal aspects of religion. Both the Brahmins and the mullahs inevitably had to recognise the threat inherent in this trend because it included an element of protest against all forms of dogmatic rigidity upheld by the priestly classes in the two religions. While it is undeniable that there was a huge distance between the religious positions of Hindu and Muslim orthodoxy, yet there existed a minority of discerning spirits among both the communities for whom Hinduism and Islam were different expressions of the religious truth but which could be reconciled. Within the parameters of their respective religions, the Bhaktas and the Sufis became instruments of dissemination of certain liberal trends, and their influence reinforced and accelerated the process of fraternization between Hinduism and Islam minimizing thereby the reactionary and retrogressive elements that sought to pander to the communal sentiments. An atmosphere grew up where more importance was attached to the spiritual values of religion than to the ritual and communal aspects. Many minds began to think that external aspect of religion had no significance and outward conformity began to slacken.[2] Thus in the socio-religious scene of contemporary Punjab, there were influences of one tradition over the other, all were influenced by one another and underwent corresponding modifications. If some Hindu works were being translated into Persian for the advantage of educated Muslims, many Hindus had also started using Persian as a medium for literacy and artistic expressions.[3] Mutual contact, reaction and reconciliation between Hindu and Muslim traditions were thus noteworthy phenomena of the religious climate of contemporary Punjab. Guru

[1]W.C. Smith, "The Crystallisation of Religious Communities in Mughal India", *The Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. IX, 1982, p. 35.

[2]I.H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, p. 123.

[3]We can presume that by this time a small but knowledgeable set of people were familiar with Sanskrit and Persian and with basic religious ideas of Hindus and Muslims. This was the background which led to the production of a large number of works, during fourteenth and fifteenth and subsequent centuries, in Hindi using popular legends combining them with Sufi mysticism on the one hand and Hindu mythology, philosophy on the other.

Nanak, in fact, emerged as a religious leader in a region which had already confronted and assimilated Islamic influences.

To bring out the distinctive character of Nanak's religious message and its originality, it is essential to study briefly the contemporary religious conditions of Hindu and Muslim sects, the traditions of Jogis and Sufis as also the process of their mutual interaction in the Punjab. The most important single group on the religious scene of the Punjab was the sect of the Siddhas who had spread largely over northern India. Since the Siddhas were inveterate travellers, constantly on the move, their direct or indirect influence extended to eastern and western India. The Siddha tradition appears to have evolved in Tamil also *pari passu* with other religious sects and the resultant conflicts.[1] Although the Siddhas were essentially a northern movement with a distinct mystic tradition of their own yet it cannot be ruled out that they had an all India basis and framework. Recent studies show a growing interest in the Siddhas both from an Indian perspective and from a comparative viewpoint. It would appear that any serious study of the religious milieu of Guru Nanak will be incomplete without taking into account the phenomenon of the Siddhas because Nanak shows greater awareness of their existence and influence than of any other sect in the Punjab. The extent of their influence in the Punjab is indicated by the number of compositions which Nanak addressed to Jogis[2] of various denominations.

The antecedents of yoga lead us into the early period of Indian tradition.[3] However "the gradual spread of yoga practice regarded as

[1]K. Kailashapathy, "The Writings of the Tamil Siddhas", *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India,* eds., Karine Shomer and W.H. McLeod, p. 387.

K. Kailashapathy traces the beginnings of the Siddha Marg in Tamil to Tirumular (also known as Sundaranath in certain Puranas) who is generally ascribed to the sixth or seventh century AD.

[2]There are many references to the Jogis, Nathas and Avadhoots not only in the Japji but also in hymns in the *Adi Granth.* The importance attached to the Nathayogis by Guru Nanak can be measured from the fact that Siddha Gosthi, a composition purporting to be a discussion between Nanak and a group of Jogis, was specifically written in the *Adi Granth*. One feels that the Jogis were regarded as posing a particular threat and Guru Nanak treats them with seriousness. Criticisms of the Jogis are more vehement than of their rivals, i.e., *pandits* and the *mullahs*.

[3]J.H. Marshall, *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization*, being an official account of archaeological excavations at Mohenjo-daro carried out by the Government of India between 1922 and 1927, pp. 48-56.

In the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, yoga appears as a way to realization of God and this idea was reflected in the *Bhagavadgita* as well where diverse definitions of yoga are given. See *Bhagavadgita*, IV, 5; V, 5; VI, 1-4; VIII, 10, 12; 27- 28; XI, 4.

an admirable way of salvation can be traced both in juridico-theological and the didactic and religious portions of the *Mahabharata.*"[1] In the Puranas and the *Mahabharata* references to the Siddhas are found and by eighth century onwards they became special teachers of a type of esoteric yoga and indicated connections with the Siddhacharyas of the Buddhist Sahajiya cult.

From eleventh century onwards Hathayoga became a movement of considerable importance and by the fifteenth century it had reached its zenith in the Punjab. Frequent references to Jogis by Nanak show his familiarity with and reaction to a well-knit and well-established organization which had emerged as the most powerful sect in the Punjab.[2]

There were in fact several sects of Nathayogis but they are regarded as a single *panth* because they share a common allegiance to Gorakhnath, adherence to the Hathayoga technique and observance of the practice of wearing large ear-rings (*mudra*), a custom which has earned them the name of *kanphat* or 'split-ear' Jogis.[3] It is important to note that there is no evidence at all for making a difference and distinction between the words Siddhas, Jogis, Avadhoots and Nathas in the context of medieval yogic mysticism. The texts of Natha Sampradaya prove that Siddhas are called Jogis as well as Nathas and that Natha Sampradaya means Siddha Sampradaya or vice versa. However, the word Natha is used as an epithet for followers of Gorakhnath. Natha-tradition ascribes to Gorakhnath the systematization of creed and organization. He displayed remarkable organizational capacity and in spite of heterogeneous elements of diverse origin, Gorakh succeeded in consolidating and evolving an integrated system of yogic beliefs and practices known as Hathayoga claiming indigenous origins.

The Siddhas were an anti-Brahminical establishment and it has been remarked that "Yoga represented a reaction against metaphysical speculations and excesses of a fossilized ritualism."[4] There was sharp criticism and rejection of all external formalities with regard to religious practices and the "Siddhas challenged the very foundations of medieval Hinduism; the authority of the Shastras, the validity of the rituals and the basis of the caste system were often questioned by the Siddhas. It

[1]Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, pp. 31-33.

[2]Several places in the Punjab were associated with the Jogis, Gorakhhatri, Jakhbar, Bawanna Bohar, Achal, Bera etc. See *Char-Bagh-i-Punjab*, pp. 102, 104, 105, 210, 211, 299. See also H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, pp. 123-25, 289.

[3]G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis*; Shashibhushan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*; Mircea Eliade, op. cit.; B.N. Goswami and J.S. Grewal, *The Mughals and the Jogis of Jakhbar.*

[4]Mircea Eliade, op. cit., p. 360.

is true that the Siddhas did not constitute a well-defined school of thought and differed in their attitude towards life and society and religion."[1] However, "almost all of them manifest a protest, expressed often in very strong terms, against the formalities of life and religion, denial of religious practices,[2] and "in direct opposition to Hindu orthodoxy, no distinction at all was made with regard to caste"[3] within their fraternity and many of the Siddhas came from low castes. Since the Siddhas were implacable opponents of the caste system and the gradations of orthodoxy and respectability that it gave rise to — "they have been stigmatized as a deviation from the caste Hindu conformist model." The reaction of Siddhas to orthodoxy is also seen in their refusal to recognise the merit of pilgrimage "wander not to the sacred places, O Siddha", said Gorakh.

The concept of a preceptor plays a crucial role in the Siddha-Siddhanta scheme of enlightenment. Though the Siddhas held their original guru to be Shiva himself, yet a Siddha becomes one by being initiated into the fold by a guru, preceptor. The novice emerges after initiation "endowed with a totally different being from that which he possesses before his initiation, he has become another."[4] The importance of the true preceptor is emphasized by Gorakh who enables the novice to expefience the ultimate stage of *sahaj* or merger with the Absolute. The *sahaj* blending or merging with the ultimate Reality was an experience of inexpressible happiness and ineffable radiance, waveless equipoise, absolute tranquillity and of absolute non-duality or complete unity. One who attains this state of being, is described as *Jivanmukta* and the state itself is one of *Jivanmukti.* The chief aim of Nathayogis was to attain this state of *Jivanmukti* or immortality in life, according to their way of life and its interpretation. The Nathapanthis were staunch Hathayogis addicted to strenuous bodily practices which, they claimed, made a man immortal. They emphasised the absolute necessity of renouncing all worldly ties and pleasures as a precondition for success of their *sadhana*. The Nathas looked at the human body with cynical contempt and regretted that the soul had been housed in the repulsive physical structure and they laid great stress on controlling nerve centre of mind and body.[5] Without going into further details of

[1]K. Kailashapathy, op. cit., p. 389.

[2]K.V. Zvelebil, *The Poets of the Powers,* p. 8.

[3]Ibid., p. 133.

[4]W.C. Beane and Williams G. Doty, eds., *Myths, Rites, Symbols: Mircea Eliade Reader,* vol. I, p.184.

[5]The disciplining of body and soul involved a number of theoretical postulates as well as actual physiological process. The exercise of *asana* (posture), *dhauti* (washing), *bandh* (different kinds of motionlessness), *mudra* (gesture), *pranayam* (breath control) and other techniques were prescribed so as to achieve full discipline of body and mind.

this form of yoga,[1] not being strictly relevant to this discussion, it may be stated that the highest pursuit of this system was a state of *sahaj* or everlasting bliss. The legendary nine Natha masters including the celebrated Gorakhnath are believed to have achieved the practical results of rigorous discipline by dwelling eternally in the recesses of the Himalayas and came to be known as *Jivanmukta* (liberated while living). It is a state of true perfection where the Jogi is supposed to be one with the whole universe. *Jivanmukti* was the state of Shiva-hood where mortality of human body (*sidhadeha*) led to immortality in divine body (*divyadeha*).[2] In this state the Jogi hears the divine music (*anahad dhvani*) and divine word (*sabad*) of ultimate truth.[3]

It is important to note that the Siddhas aimed at acquiring the state of *Jivanmukta* by leading a life of seclusion and hence developed a strong sense of social detachment. They not only cut themselves off from the orthodox Brahminical set of Hinduism and social conformity, but also insisted on the necessity of developing a detachment from "desires for sensations"; an important prerequisite for moral improvement was withdrawal from society and the Siddhas emphasized a negative attitude about life. Notwithstanding the proverbial laxity attributed to Jogis by popular opinion the didactic literature of the Nathapanthis exhibited a very puritanical stance, especially in the matter of continence, vehemently opposing any association with women who are shown in the worst possible light and depicted as mortal enemies of a Jogi, only worthy of condemnation.[4] This aversion to women is traditionally attributed to Gorakhnath and his disciple Charpatnath both of whom seem to have had great sway in Punjab. Women, however, came to occupy an integral part in the Tantric system of yoga because believers in this form of yoga gave the most important emphasis to the Samkhya doctrine of *Prakriti* and *Purusha*, its aim being the identification of

[1]The *Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati*, the *Amrit Kunda* as also other works by Gorakh's followers form the basis of physical teachings of Hathayoga. A number of works were written in Punjabi and Hindawi by successive generations of disciples using the name Gorakh to emphasise their spiritual links with the master. For details of physical aspect of Hathayoga see Shashibhusan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults; Introduction to Tantric Buddhism;* G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and Kanphata Yogis;* Mohan Singh, *Gorakh and Medieval Hindu Mysticism;* Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, *Natha Sampradaya;* Malik Kalayani, *Natha Sampradaya, Darshan aur Sadhana Pranali* (Hindi); P.D. Barthwal, ed., *Gorakhbani* (Hindi).

[2]Shashibhushan Dasgupta, op. cit., p. 218.

[3]Mohan Singh, *A History of Panjabi Literature (1100-1932)*, p. 30.

[4]P.D. Barthwal, op. cit., p. 164. This puritanical attitude was extended to meat, liquor and drugs. Gorakh was firmly opposed to all this, 'consuming alcoholic drink, flesh and *bhang* one goes to hell', says Gorakh, ibid., p. 169.

individual soul with Supreme Soul. In other words, the supreme goal of the Tantric yogic pattern was a "complete identification with Shakti and Shiva through the realization of immobility on all the three levels of thought, respiration and seminal emission." In fact the aim of a Tantric as with the Siddha was the achievement of absolute union with God, but in the Tantric version of yoga this union is explained in "terms of the perfect sexual union (like the oneness of Shiva and Shakti) and appropriate myths and rituals are invoked to legitimize such a spiritual union." In other words, sexual union is both a symbol and reality. Myths and rituals sanctify the principle of sexual union and which in turn provides the rationale for certain myths and rituals.[1] "It is important to take note that Vaishnava saints, Nirguna Bhaktas and even Guru Nanak used the vivid imagery of man-woman intimacy to express the God-soul relationship. The intense love of human soul for merger with the Absolute God is often explained in terms of man-woman confluence; but in the Tantric teachings and practices sexuality became the very basis of spiritual union. The excesses of the Tantric practices, bordering on licentiousness, had brought about their decadence. Ganesh Das lamented about their religion, for wine, meat and sexual intercourse were much in common.[2] Objectionable on moral grounds in the eyes of majority, the practices of their rites perhaps remained limited and secretive.[3]

With the exception of a few disciples in the line of Gorakhnath, most of the Jogis in medieval Punjab aimed at acquiring *sidhis* and, through occult power, control over society. The word *sidhi* means success, perfection, fulfilment, supernatural power etc. and these meanings are found in different context in different Sanskrit texts.[4] The Upanishads clearly describe the supernatural powers which are said to result from the practice of yoga. That the idea of *sidhi* is associated with yoga is clear from *Yogasutra* of Patanjali and Tantric texts.[5] According to *Yogasutra*, the *sidhis* or perfections proceed from birth, from drugs or from spells or from self-castigation or from concentration.[6] In fact, magic has been an important element of human belief and civilization. The attainment of occult powers and interest in herbs[7] were integral

[1]K. Kailashapathy, op. cit., p. 396.
[2]Ganesh Das, *Char Bagh-i-Punjab,* p. 178.
[3]Mircea Eliade, op. cit., p. 295.
[4]M. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary,* p. 126.
[5]J.H. Wood, *The Yogasutras of Patanjali,* p. 299.
[6]*Yogasutrabhasya,* (III, p. 55) explains 8 *sidhis* called Vibhutis. See also *Encyclopaedia of Religions and Ethics,* ed., James Hastings, VII, article on 'magic'.
[7]The Siddhas were at times physicians and they traced their system of medicine to sage Agastya to whom are ascribed numerous medical treatise.

aspects of the medieval Jogis' culture also and one finds enough reference to this in contemporary works. They had no hesitation in playing upon the people's gullibility, who were naturally impressed by the display of supernatural and healing powers of Jogis.

Besides the healing Jogis, Rawals performing miracles were also a familiar sight in the Punjab of Guru Nanak's times. Briggs describes the Rawals as follows: "They make charms for themselves and some sell them to others. They pronounce spells and practise palmistry and juggling, tell fortunes, interpret dreams, sell woollen amulets to protect children from the evil eye, pretend to cure disease—some are reputed to have transmuted base metals into gold—some are said to be able to control hailstorms.[1]

Apart from pretenders of miraculous powers, begging Jogis were a very familiar sight in the Punjab of Nanak's days. The Jogis must have been an awesome sight with large ear-rings hanging from their split ears and their heads either covered with matted hair or wearing only a loin cloth around their waist. They smeared their bodies with ash.[2] While entering a village to beg for food, a Jogi would blow a conchshell or a whistle and cry 'Alakh-Alakh'[3] or 'Gorakh-Gorakh'.[4] The fearsome appearance of the Jogi was sometimes accompanied by an equally fierce conduct and behaviour, so much so that they are described as "warrior beggars taking alms by force."[5]

It seems that by the time of Nanak the system of yoga had degenerated. It is evident from the nature of Nanak's taunts which range from comments on their appearance to their lack of social responsibilities. The Jogis are stripped of their disguise and exposed as hypocrites who deceive the unwary. In fact, ideas of yoga, deeply spiritualized, appear in the compositions of Nanak but (as will be discussed later) he is not making a systematic exposition of any aspect of Hathayoga nor a sustained effort to assimilate any aspect of medieval yogic culture. He shows an acute awareness of the degeneration of the Jogis and reacted vehemently against some of the erroneous postulates adhered to by the contemporary Siddhas and Nathas.

Besides the influence of Jogis, Hinduism in Punjab, as in other parts of country, was characterized by various forms of religious beliefs and practices. It was not a homogenous religion but a configuration of different religious cults and schools of thoughts, including both the

[1]G.W. Briggs, op. cit., p. 110.

[2]H.A. Rose, op. cit., p. 389. The author gives some indication of the way in which Jogis were regarded at the time of the census of 1881 and 1891.

[3]One of the ways of addressing God as the Formless or Imperishable one.

[4]Name of the founder of his order.

[5]R.C. Temple, *The Legends of the Punjab,* p. 435.

Vedic and non-Vedic elements. There was diversity both in terms of different religious denominations and philosophical systems. The main components of Hindu religion at worship level were Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism. Other minor cults were also in existence. There is enough evidence to prove the predominance of Shaivism in Punjab.[1] Numerous references to *shivalas* in the town and countryside of Punjab suggest that Shiva was the most popular of the Brahminical deities in Punjab as well as in other parts of northern India.[2] Vaishnavism which contemplated the worship of God Vishnu and his several *avataras* appears to have been comparatively less popular but there were nevertheless some centres of Vaishnavas in Punjab at places like Kangra, Multan, Lahore, Muzaffarabad, Wazirabad and Derajat in the fifteenth century. In the compositions of Guru Nanak there are references to Vishnu, Narain, Hari and Krishna which may be taken as an evidence of the existence of Vaishnavism in Punjab.[3] It has been suggested that in all probability the bulk of Vaishnavas consisted of the members of the trading communities in towns and cities, notably the Khatris. In a certain sense they represented what may loosely be called the Hindu orthodoxy.[4] Besides Shaivism and Vaishnavism, Shaktism which believed in the worship of female deity was another popular cult in the Punjab, especially hill regions.[5] The Jwalamukhi temple of Ambika Devi had been a very popular temple and place of pilgrimage not only for the people of Punjab but also from outside.[6] Bhai Lehna (the future Guru Angad) is reported to have been a regular visitor to this temple before he became disciple of Guru Nanak.

The religious life of the common man was governed by performance of rituals, ranging from observance of the prescribed *sanskaras*[7] to visiting places of pilgrimage. The merit of ceremonial rituals and pilgrimages to sacred places was recognized by practically all the Hindus. Guru Nanak alludes to sixty-eight sacred places of Hindus

[1]L.M. Joshi, "Religious Beliefs and Practices," in *History of Punjab,* vol. III, ed. Fauja Singh, p. 294.

[2]H.A. Rose, op. cit., p. 200. The author observes that all castes in the Punjab worshipped Shiva including the Brahmins, Khatris, followed by Vaishyas. See also Ganesh Das, op. cit., pp. 176, 177, 180, 273, 305.

[3]*Adi Granth,* Rag Asa, p. 465.

[4]J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History,* p. 120.

[5]Some of the important places in the hilly region were named after one or the other Devi such as Simla after the name of Shyamala Devi, Kalka after Kalka Devi and the like.

[6]William Crooke, *The Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India,* p. 119.

[7]For a study of Hindu *samskaras*, rites relating to family life, see P. Thomas, *Hindu Religion and Manners.*

and speaks of the rituals performed there.[1] He was vehemently opposed to the performance of such rituals and says in one of the *banis* "Sacrifices, burnt offerings, charity given to acquire merit, austerities, even ritual worship at places of pilgrimage, all are worthless and body continues to endure suffering."[2] In general, Hinduism in Punjab had degenerated into a set of dogmas, proliferation and multiplication of gods, rituals and ceremonials. Much of what passed for religion Guru Nanak saw as nothing more than a commercial transaction in which lower castes were exploited by the minority to whom tradition gave certain privileges. Hindu faith seemed to have lost its core of values and vitality, largely due to the retrogressive and reactionary domination of the priestly class. The learned *pandits* remained occupied more with intellectual wranglings than with spreading the religious spirit amongst the people in general. They generally maintained and promoted sectarian interests through philosophical and ideological debates. The six schools of Hindu philosophy also implied divisiveness among religious thinkers and provided material for theoretical discourses in which learned Brahmins took some interest, less with a view to seeking spiritual enlightenment than as a technique for display of knowledge.[3] In fact each school of Hindu philosophy evolved its own system of metaphysics and, following a separate course of development, had drifted apart. Their sectarianism fuelled jealousies and rivalries.

Despite mutual differences and separate identities, the Hindu sects tended to develop in a syncretic and integrative manner. The firm belief in the existence of an eternal Reality and acceptance of the Vedas bound different sects together and minimized their areas of conflicting opinions. Moreover, in various parts of Punjab, temples were dedicated to the Trinity of Hinduism—Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma and, not infrequently, separate shrines to Shiva and Shakti formed part of a single temple complex. The inclusion of prominent deities in the microcosm of temple worship tended to promote harmony among the common people.

Apart from the prevalence of various Hindu sects, Jainism was also probably to be found in Punjab in Guru Nanak's days. The number of followers of this religion, however, seems to have been confined to trading communities of Punjab.[4] Due to the exemplary and missionary role of the Jain monks, Jainism was able to hold its sway. Moreover,

[1]*Adi Granth*, Japji, Pauri 21.
[2]Ibid., pp. 11, 27.
[3]Ibid., Rag Asa, p. 453.
[4]According to H.A. Rose, most of the Jains of Punjab belonged to trading classes, op. cit., p. 105. There is however no reason to suppose that the Jain monks had no lay following in the Punjab.

the Jain monks and teachers, in seeking to promote their religion, admitted within its fold certain features of Hinduism, and Hindu deities (such as Shiva, Vishnu) were included in the list of outstanding personages of Jainism. The recognition of such Hindu scriptures like the Vedas as the source of knowledge by the Jains also helped to mitigate popular hostility towards them in North India. The chief characteristics of the Jain monks noted by Sujan Rai[1] were their ascetical practices and their meticulousness about *ahimsa* or non-injury to living being. Though Jains are generally known for their cleanliness, it appears that the Jains of Punjab, in the times of Nanak, had become rather unclean. In one of his *banis* he describes them thus: "They (the Jains) pluck their hair, drink dirty water, beg and eat others' eatings, do not use natural water, having smeared their heads with ash they pluck their heads like sheep, they give up their ancestral occupations, their families weep with lamentations, day and night they are filthy, they are always in a mood of despair and never live a life of prosperity."[2] With a sarcastic invective Nanak condemned their unclean behaviour.[3]

By the time of Guru Nanak, Buddhism had also yielded to the assimilative force of Hinduism and in actual practice had "compromised with the Brahminical religion to such an extent that it could almost have been regarded as a sect of the latter."[4] Muslim conquest gave a serious blow to Buddhist centres in Punjab. Moreover, Tantric element did much to undermine the philosophical position of Buddhism and made it more vulnerable to Hinduism. Buddha is mentioned by Nanak but only in the context of Siddhas with whom he had personal contacts, and the teachings of Buddha, if they at all reached Nanak, had reached him in a disguised form only through the Nathapanthi Jogis and the Siddhas.[5]

Notwithstanding the existence of various Hindu cults and sects, Islam was becoming the dominant religion due to the establishment of Muslim rule. The fascinating elements of Islam were: (i) the belief in monotheism—one God who is the creator of universe, omnipotent, benevolent and compassionate, (ii) the utter subservience of the human will to the Divine will, (iii) those who accepted the oneness of God and worshipped Him formed a democratic community in which there were to be no distinctions of high and low, superior or inferior. For truly in God's eyes all are equal. The brotherhood of Islam was not to stop at the boundaries of nation, race or wealth. A unique spirit of

[1]Sujan Rai, *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh*, p. 23.
[2]*Adi Granth*, Var Majh, p. 149.
[3]Ibid., Var Malar, p. 1284.
[4]Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, vol. I, p. 159.
[5]A. Barth, *The Religions of India*, p. 24.

brotherhood and comradeship pervades the teachings of Islam. The *Quran* also expresses the need for adherence to the principle of toleration. "There is no compulsion in religion." As is known, idol worship is the most despicable thing in Islam. However, as far as social life is concerned no discrimination is allowed to be made by Muslims against idol worshippers. *Quran* says: "And if any one of the idolaters seeketh thy protection (O, Mohammad), thou protect him so that he may hear the word of Allah, and afterwards convey him to his place of safety. This is because they are a folk who know not."[1] Religion is a matter of choice. Compulsion is incompatible with it. Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error.[2] In short it may be emphasized that as far as Muslim faith is concerned belief in the unity of God is pivotal point around which all doctrines and teachings of Islam revolve. And this doctrine of the unity of God presupposes the concept of the unity of human race. Several verses in the Quran unequivocally establish the unity of mankind. A verse runs as follows: "Mankind were one community and Allah sent (unto them) prophets as bearers of good tidings and warners."[3] Thus the *Quran* contains progressive principles and admirable rules for personal integrity and peace on earth.

The Muslims of Punjab were the bearers of a well defined and formulated Muslim faith "heirs to a systematically evolved law and theology and to a form of worship which had since long been crystallized into a set pattern of piety, at least as an ideal."[4] Although the Muslims had their own divisions of Sunnis and Shias, the former predominated in the Punjab both in terms of number and influence. The Sunnis conformed with the traditional theology of Islam while the Shias represented the unorthodox sect of Islam. They recognized the authority of Prophet Mohammad but also had firm faith in the authority of twelve Imams in the line from Fatima and Ali. Of the four Khalifas, they only considered Ali to be legitimate and disowned the other three Khalifas. Notwithstanding the division of the Muslims into Sunnis and Shias, both of them believed in the uniqueness of Allah, in Mohammad as the last of the prophets and in the *Quran* as the word of God revealed by Mohammad. Alongwith the *Quran*, the traditions and sayings of the Prophet, compiled as the *Hadis*, form the two main sources of *shariat*—the code of Laws and regulations that govern the entire life of a Muslim—religious, moral, social, political and economic.

[1]*Quran*, IX, 6.
[2]Ibid., II, 256.
[3]Ibid., II, 21.
[4]K.M. Ashraf, *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan*, p. 271.

Further development of *shariat* is the result of *ijtihad* and *ijma*. This came to be known as *fiqh*. Gradually, different schools of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) were formed and out of those four schools have been generally recognized and accepted by the majority of the Muslims.[1]

The overall attainment of the objectives of the Muslim faith and the *shariat* may be viewed in the context of the relation of man with God, of the *abd* (servant) with the *Al-Rabb* (Lord). It is the *ibadat* of God, the end which has been declared in the *Quran* as the goal of man's life. "I created the Jinn and mankind only that they might worship Me." Every obedience to God's command and every fulfilment of His will is *ibadat* provided it is inspired and accompanied by the sense of absolute submission and humility. In orthodox Muslim theology, "Allah's absolute transcendence over His creation as well as His uniqueness of power and majesty were asserted and emphasized with support from appropriate quotations from the *Quran*." There is no God save Allah—by uttering this *kalima* (faith formula) a Muslim declared his belief in *tauhid* (the unity of God) on the one hand and his determination to live by his belief on the other. *Tauhid* is, therefore, not only a faith (*iman)* but also a way of life according to Islam and this demands that *Rabb* alone is the object of worship and He alone should be approached for all needs of the body and soul. It may be noted that apart from submission to His worship, *salat* (prayer), *rozah* (fasting), *zakat* (obligatory alms), and *haj* (pilgrimage) *zikar* (remembrance), *sadaqat* (optional alms); service to mankind, kindness, benevolence, proper discharge of duties towards parents, wife or husband and children, neighbours and the society at large were also many other kinds of *ibadat* (alongwith *Farz*) which a Muslim was supposed to perform with a profound sense of humility towards God. "The *Quran* was always a potential source of individual inspiration for an emotionally religious life but the general conception of piety among the orthodox was as much ritualistic as their theology formalistic."[2] The daily practice of praying five times was, for soul, as much an effort to achieve communion with Allah as a set of ceremonies displaying a Muslim's obedience to ceremonial worship and devotion.[3]

During the three centuries of Muslim rule in the Punjab, before the advent of Guru Nanak, the socio-religious life of the Muslims was marked by sectarian differences, ritualism and authoritarian hegemony of the Muslim orthodoxy. A study of the socio-religious life in the

[1]They have been named after their originators—Abu Hanifa (d. 150 AH), Malik b. Anas (d. 179 AH), Muhammad b. Idris al-Shafii (d. 204 AH), and Ahmed b. Hanbal (d. 241 AH)—as Hanafi, Maliki, Shafii and Hanbali, respectively.

[2]J.S. Grewal, op. cit., p. 67.

[3]G.E. von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam*, p. 114.

Punjab of fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with a predominant military Muslim polity, exercising political powers in its own interest and committing excesses every now and then that hurt the religious sentiments of non-Muslims, would show that belief in one God (as also of the unity and equality of human race in His eyes) had become a theological dogma for a professedly monotheistic and egalitarian community of Muslims and not a living social reality. Since Guru Nanak appeared as a religious thinker and reformer in a region that had confronted and assimilated Islamic influence he could not remain untouched by a society that bore the impact of Islam and its attributes. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was aware not only of Islam being a potent socio-religious reality in the Punjab but also of the impact of Muslim political domination. He displays familiarity with the working of the Muslim faith and society and also an equal awareness of the limitations of the contemporary Muslim faith. He was bold enough to denounce its formalism and ritualism, as also the misrule, maladministration and high-handedness of Muslim rulers.[1]

Broadly speaking Guru Nanak observed and reacted to Islam at three levels, (i) at the level of religious formalism, (ii) the social behaviour of the representatives of Islam i.e., *qazis* and *mullahs* involving their failure to lead a life according to what they preached to others, and (iii) the fact of ascendancy of Islam, as a political force.[2] It is Nanak's ability to distinguish between the essential truth and unimportant features that he charged the *mullahs* and *qazis* with deviating from the right path. The indictment of hypocrisy is the main point of criticism which Nanak levels against the custodians of Islam and for that matter his attitude is the same towards Hinduism. An avaricious *qazi* is told "you recite the prayers five times a day, and you read the *Quran*", says Nanak "the grave summons you and now your food and drinks are at an end."[3] The *qazi* is advised to regard good conduct as his *kalimah* and the five principles of conduct and worship viz., *sach* (truth), *halal* (lawful earning), *khair* (wishing well of others), *niyat* (right intention), and *sifat* (praise of lord) as his five prayers. Only he is a *qazi* who effects himself with these virtues and knows the True Lord.[4] Guru Nanak's observations show that he was aware of the reactionary and retrogressive attitude of the *ulma*. Many of them were in the service of state and their involvement in politics and self-

[1]*Adi Granth,* Rag Asa, pp. 468-71.

[2]As can be seen in the *Babur Vani* verses in Rag Asa in the *Adi Granth.* Nanak's reaction to the political ascendancy of Islam is analysed in the last chapter i.e., Political Ramifications of Sikhism under the First Five Sikh Gurus.

[3]*Adi Granth*, Sri Rag, p. 24.

[4]Ibid.

seeking pursuits had led to their degeneration. Sultan Balban accused them of lack of truthfulness and Amir Khusro charged them with hypocrisy and conceit while Zia Barani, a distinguished theologian, himself admits that he along with others of his class helped the Sultan in openly violating the religious injunctions of Islam by deliberately stretching the meaning of the Quranic text only to suit the desires of the Sultan.[1] K.M. Ashraf refers to the plurality of wives among the *ulama* and states that the Muslim theologians, as their Brahmin counterpart, were known for their greed.[2] Medieval saints like Dadu and Kabir were dissatisfied with their behaviour and poured bold scorn on the hypocrisy of Muslim priestly class.[3] Kabir lamented that he sought everywhere but could not find the true follower of Islam.[4] Dadu blamed the *mullahs* for aggravating social tensions between Hindus and Muslims and insisted that the *ulama* who posed as men of religion should not encourage sectarian differences.[5]

Guru Nanak and the Sikh Gurus, who succeeded him, similarly did not spare the *qazis* and the *mullahs* and criticized them severely for their bigotry, marked narrow mindedness and formalism. Though they were the recognized guardians of the traditional socio-religious system of the Muslim Sunni community, there is no evidence to show that the *ulama* of the fifteenth century provided moral leadership to the Muslim society. Like their counterpart Brahmins, the leaders of Muslims too had become exploiters and morally corrupt. "The one who has become a *qazi* pretends to administer justice. Taking bribes he dispenses injustice."[6] At another place Guru Nanak says, "The hungry *mullah* has turned his house into a mosque."[7] Guru Nanak urged and enjoined upon the *qazi* to adjust his conduct to his profession and be worthy of a true Muslim. "Mere talk can never lead to paradise, salvation lies in right conduct. If you add spices to unlawfully earned food it does not become lawful. Falsehood begets only falsehood."[8]

In short, Guru Nanak displayed a comprehensive understanding and awareness of the beliefs and practices of contemporary Muslims and their ritualism. Abuses in Muslim society did not escape his incisive observations and reactions and in the passages addressed to Muslim audience, he emphasised the universal aspects of Islam which Muslims

[1]K.M. Ashraf, op. cit., p. 180.
[2]Ibid, p. 184.
[3]Dadu, *Granthavali,* 16/45.
[4]Kabir, *Ramaini,* p. 5.
[5]Dadu, op. cit., 16/27.
[6]*Adi Granth*, p. 951.
[7]Ibid., p. 1245.
[8]Ibid., Var Majh, p. 141.

had ceased to reflect in their behaviour patterns. Several times, abuses in Muslim and Hindu practices are mentioned together but quite often references to Islam stand apart. Nanak talks of the prophet, the *Quran* and the *shariat,* but, like Hindu scripture, he discards the Muslim scripture too as irrelevant to salvation. He regards Mohammad and his religion as one of the numerous manifestations of God's creation. It is important to note that Nanak's observations and reactions are not directed against Islam as such. He never maligned Islam but only its practitioners, particularly the *qazis* and the *mullahs* who were repeatedly reminded by Nanak that they should submit themselves to God whose oneness they were always proclaiming against Hindu polytheism. He advised them to remember that "Allah is ineffable, inscrutable, all powerful creator and merciful. The whole world is transitory. He alone is permanent. He is Eternal. The Earth and the Heavens shall perish, only He, the only one, remains for ever."[1]

Although Guru Nanak shows familiarity with the orthodox Muslim beliefs and social practices, he was attracted most to the path of Muslim mystics, i.e., the Sufis.

All Muslims were not Sufis but all Sufis were Muslims. From the very beginning of its penetration in India, Sufism had become a very strong force in the Punjab because Sufi influence entered our land mainly through North-Western Frontiers (this was exactly the position notwithstanding the fact the Sufis settled in the South also).

The growth of Sufism[2] is a significant illustration of the mystical tendencies in Islam at a given time. So far as mysticism is concerned "it is a constant and unvarying phenomena of universal yearning of human spirit for personal communion with God"[3] and in this basic quest the mystical experience is the elan of mystic movements in all religions of the world. "While firmly embedded in Islam and its sacred law (the *shariat*)", observes G.S. Talib, "Sufism did represent that tendency of human spirit which time and again breaks free of encumberances of formal and constricting creeds and endeavours to experience directly the infinite and ineffable."[4] In other words, the Sufis or Muslim mystics became pioneers in expressing an attitude and code of conduct quite different from those of orthodox Muslims.

[1]Ibid., Sri Rag, p. 64.

[2]The Sufis, the mystics of Islam, derived their name from garments of coarse wool 'Suf' which they wore as a badge of poverty. They believed in God as the only reality and aimed at spiritualism of Islam from within. Conflicts in the metaphysics and ethics of formal religion were sought to be resolved through their own intuition, not through reasoned arguments.

[3]A.J. Arberry, *An Introduction to the History of Sufism*, p. 3.

[4]G.S. Talib, "Guru Nanak and Sufism", *Journal of Religious Studies*, p. 29.

Their ideas and beliefs did not remain confined to fixed theological postulates of Islam. They developed cosmic emotions and mystical consciousness as an antidote to rigidity and dogmatic formalism of various schools of jurisprudence in Islam. As aptly put by Arberry "the mystic call in Islam was the result of an inner rebellion of conscience against social injustices of the age as also the result of political successes to which Islam was exposed."[1] It "was as a response and reaction to political ascendancy of Islam and Islamic theological orthodoxy that mystical trends arose within the Islamic praxis seeking to accommodate the basic doctrine to the new environs as also to cleanse it of the encrusting formalism." Though the Sufi programme of reform was bound up with the awakening of religious conscience of the individual, it contained germs of protest as well, against the socio-political abuse of the power enjoyed by the Sunni *ulama* over the Muslim masses. The Sufis were often frowned upon since they had broken away from orthodoxy. In spite of opposition by the Muslim orthodoxy, particularly the *ulama*, the Sufis acquired a legitimate position in Islam. Eminent Sufis like Hallaj-al-Qushairi and Abu Hamid-al-Ghazali drew upon a wide range of mystic experiences and henceforth a rich legacy of mysticism was 'domesticated' in Islamic world.

The penetration of Sufism in Punjab is subsequent to its systematization and resolution of conflict with the orthodoxy. The general belief that Muslim saints and Sufis came to Punjab in the wake of Ghaznavi conquest has been proved to be incorrect. There are references to Sufis in earlier authentic books.[2] According to *Kashf-ul-Mahajub,* a number of Sufi saints and scholars had settled in Lahore prior to Hujwari.[3] The belligerent atmosphere created in Punjab by Mahmud Ghaznavi's exploits began to subside when regular Sufi orders embarked upon their mission of inculcating higher spiritual values among the people. Of the earliest popular Sufi centres in Punjab was that of Shaikh-ul-Hujwari, popularly known as Datar Ganjbaksh, whose work *Kashf-ul-Mahajub* became the most important Sufi text and source of inspiration for the Sufis in India. Not long after Hujwari, were set up the regular Sufi orders of Chishtis and Suhrawardis that played an

[1]Arberry, op. cit., p. 37.

[2]For early rise of Sufis in Punjab see Murray T. Titus, *Islam in India and Pakistan*, pp. 37-38; T.W. Arnold, *Preachings of Islam;* Maulana Qazi Athar Mubarakpuri, *Hindustan Mein Arbon Ki Hukumatein*, pp. 24-25.

[3]Hujwari came in 1035 and died at Lahore in 1072. He was the author of a number of works of which *Kashf-ul-Mahajub* became a very important source of mystic guidance for Sufis of North India. In this work, the author refers to early Sufi settlements in Lahore and that some of them opposed his thoughts. See R.A. Nicholson, *The Mystic of Islam*, pp. 236-43; as also S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. I, p. 113.

important role in the religious and socio-cultural history of the Punjab from early thirteenth century onwards. Khwaja Moin-ud-din Chishti, Bhakhtiyar Kaki and Shaikh Farid and Nizam-ud-din were among the most prominent leaders of Chishti order in northern India. The Suhrawardi order was nourished in Punjab by Shaikh Baha-ud-din Zakaria. He made Multan and Uchh his centres. Later all the famous Sufi orders viz., Qadiris, Naqshbandis also entered Punjab and the land became a major centre of Sufi activities. In Lodis' times, Musa Ananger was popular as a *shaikh* in Lahore and Ishal Kaku and Ishak Qadiri were on their way to attaining prominence.[1] During the sixteenth century, the Qadiri order of Sufis gained considerable influence in Punjab with centres at Multan, Uchh and Lahore. In fact, Punjab became a feeder and tributary stream of knowledge, wisdom and spirituality of the Sufis. The names of Baba Farid, Ala-ul-Haq, Jalal-ud-din Bukhari, Makhdum Jahaniyan and Shaikh Ismail Bukhari became household words for piety and devotion. The ferment in the minds of men created by them prepared the intellectual milieu in which synthesis of Hindu and Muslim mystic traditions could take place.[2] Thus a large part of Punjab's rural pockets and towns came to be associated with Sufi *shaikhs* of major or minor importance.

Sufism in action centred round the personality of *pir* or *shaikh*. The importance given to *shaikh* had interesting social implications. A Sufi, in order to attain his goal and reach the end of journey, is obliged to follow the direction of a leader, *pir* or *murshid* who is believed to be able to transmit spiritual power to his *murid* or aspirant. Though the *ulama* accused the *shaikhs* of defying orthodox Muslim theology, the Sufis saw the "*shaikh* in the midst of *murids* like Mohammad in the midst of his companions"[3] and that "the *shaikh* was one living viceregent of the Prophet."[4] The contemporary Sufi works conceded the importance of *haj* but not before service of the *shaikh* i.e., only those go on pilgrimage who have no *pir*.[5] It was generally believed that it was for man to strive and for God to give but the indispensability and importance of a guide (*murshid*) was obvious to the traveller at the very stage of his spiritual voyage. A Sufi who attempts to traverse the spiritual path without the aid of counsellor or guide is said to have Satan for his guide and is compared to a tree that for want of gardener's care brings forth either bitter or no fruits at all.[6]

[1]Abdul Qadir Badaoni, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*.
[2]Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, p. 166.
[3]*Awarif-al-Ma'arif*, cf. J.S. Grewal, op. cit., p. 95.
[4]Ibid.
[5]*Fawa'id-ul-Fu'ad*, p. 87.
[6]R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, p. 32.

The most important single Sufi saint who left a deep impression on the people of Punjab was Baba Farid[1] of the Chishti order. It is important to take special note of him because his writings were incorporated in the *Adi Granth.* Shaikh Farid in fact became a very popular Muslim saint who had imbibed and adjusted thoroughly to the local environment of Punjab. After achieving a high degree of proficiency and insight into Sufi teachings and practices including *Chillai Makus* (a forty day course of prayer with head hung downwards) Baba Farid finally settled at Ajodhan, now known as Pakpattan (in Pakistan). He had far reaching influence in the Punjab and, though he had no backing of the state, his message had such potency that he attracted a large number of devotees from far and wide. Badaoni informs us that even people from Central Asia and Afghanistan flocked to Pakpattan.[2] Baba Farid's *jamat-khana* attracted people from different religious denominations as also scholars, merchants, government servants, Jogis, Muslim *qalandars* and people from nearly all sections and sects of Punjab. The prejudices of high birth and reactionary outlook of Muslim orthodoxy did not touch the spiritual serenity and classless atmosphere of his *khanqah.* Though engaged in his spiritual pursuits, Shaikh Farid was also a philanthropist who sincerely attended to the needs of the inmates of his *jamat-khana.* Although he never pleaded with any Muslim potentate for granting equal treatment to the non-believers, he always shielded the weak and the oppressed and his *khanqah* became a sanctuary where people took refuge from injustice and oppression. Baba Farid's far reaching influence in the Punjab and beyond was due as much to his austere piety, informal personal life as to his concept of salvation through service which brought him into a close touch with the masses.

Sultan Nasir-ud-din Mahmud once came to see Baba Sahib at the head of a large army which was on its way to Uchh and Multan. The thronging crowd of the vast multitude desiring to pay homage to the Shaikh was beyond control. The attendants hung the sleeves of his shirt from a balcony to be kissed by the people, very soon it was torn to shreds. At last the Shaikh came out of the mosque and asked his attendants to form a cordon round him so that the people might pay him their respect without mobbing him. People came, saluted him from a distance and went away. Suddenly an old sweeper broke into

[1]Baba Farid's ancestors came from Kabul and migrated to Punjab in the middle of twelfth century. After completing his studies he pledged service to Khwaja Bakhtiyar Kaki of Chishti order and became his *murid.* After the death of Khwaja Sahib, Baba Farid became the most popular and prominent Chishti saint of North India and strengthened the spiritual foundations of Chishti order in Punjab and laid stress on principles of universal love and service for humanity.

[2]Abdul Qadir Badaoni, op. cit., p. 312.

the cordon and fell on the feet of Baba Sahib saying, "Shaikh Farid, are you fed up? You ought to offer thanks for this blessing of God." The Shaikh cried and expressed regret, later he bade him farewell with presents.[1]

A characteristic feature of those Sufis who settled in Punjab was that they got acclimatized to the local surroundings and even adjusted the nature of their teachings thoroughly to the needs of the people. Muslim Sufis in Punjab had carried to India the legacy of intellectual formulations of Central Asian Sufi thought. They were, however, fully aware that highly philosophical postulates of Islamic mysticism i.e., Sufism, could be imbibed only by the elite and Muslim intellectuals. The metaphysics of Sufi thought rested at that time on the doctrine of *wahdat-ul-wujud* (unity of being).[2] However, for the masses of Punjab, in general, a simplified version of Sufism consisting of devotion to God and prophet proved more relevant. The Sufi literature, popular in Punjab, echoed the idea of love. The religion of lovers of God is nothing but love and this is reiterated with emphatic assertion time and again by the Sufi *shaikhs*. In the *Siyar-ul-Auliya,* the idea of the unity of love, the lover and beloved, is attributed to Shaikh Moin-ud-din. Even in the *Fawa'id-ul-Fu'ad* it is affirmed that a single particle of love is better than all the devotion of men and angels put together.[3] In fact, a Sufi no matter what his doctrinal beliefs and mode of living, is, above all, God's *ashiq,* a lover, and as such stands on a different footing in relation to God. "You can see nothing under my cloak except God."[4] Even paradise was useless without the Beloved and it is because of tiiis element of love for God that Sufism had been able to exercise tremendous influence over the masses.

Moreover, the Sufis of Punjab communicated in terms and imagery that drew tremendous response of the local population. The life of rural Punjab is reflected in the metaphors used by Farid in his poetry. Till today Baba Farid's sayings, preserved in the *Adi Granth* in Punjabi dialect, have been a source of great emotional satisfaction for the simple rural folk of Punjab. In fact it was a milieu of inter-religious

[1]Cf. A.A. Nadwi, *Saviours of Islam*, p.157.

[2]The *wahdat-ui-wujud* or unification is described by Abu-Nas-ul-Saraj, as the realisation of passing away of human nature so that "the man in the last state reverts to his first state and he becomes even as he were before he existed", see R.A. Nicholson, *The Idea of Personality in Sufism,* p. 13.

[3]*Fawa'id-ul-Fu'ad,* p. 71.

[4]*Siyar-ul-Auliya*, p. 489.

contact[1] between Hinduism and Islam, and the Sufis too, with the passage of time, adapted their traditions to the indigenous conditions. The Sufi thought gave strength to dogmatic preaching to live upto Indian environment by creating a congenial atmosphere and accommodating diverse social groups of indigenous population. The orthodox theologians rarely appreciated the need for adjustments. Sufism, therefore, did not remain a creed with exclusive Islamic colouring; as far as possible Sufis identified and adjusted and responded to local needs and challenges and in turn exerted a great influence over thought, beliefs and culture of Indian people. The work of Baba Farid was most commendable in this respect. He came very close to the common people and brought a healing touch to a society constituted, on the one hand by the orthodox Brahmin, preaching an exclusive narrow caste code, and on the other hand by the *mullah* arrogating to himself spiritual authority. Sufis thus were not living in a social vacuum. Baba Farid tried to identify with the masses and it was the daily life of Punjab countryside in which Sufi experience was sought to be expressed. This implied soaking of Sufi doctrine in the experience of local people, simple working folk of Punjab whose familiarity with life was limited to their daily life in the field and at home. What attracted people towards various Sufis who had established themselves in large parts of Punjab was their humanitarian liberal outlook and their teachings couched in idioms that would appeal to masses.

A debatable aspect relating to the Sufis of Punjab is that often Sufi centres are represented as being very active in securing conversion to Islam. For example, according to G.S. Talib, "Not only in respect of Sufi being a good pious Muslim but in his being actively engaged in the aspect of twofold process of Islamic conquest of India by sword and by propagation be understood... they (Sufis) brought much moral enlightenment but their centres were also active in propagation of Islam."[2] Khaliq Ahmed Nizami would also like us to believe that Baba Farid settled at Ajodhan to convert some backward Hindu tribes to Islam.[3] As against this, S.A.A.Rizvi feels that through example of austerity and saintly way, Baba Farid sought to reform both Muslims

[1]In this context one can say that Sufis took a similar character to much of medieval Bhakti movement and no wonder some of the Sufis had more in common with the *bhaktas* than they had with orthodox Islam and conversely some of the Hindu *bhaktas* had more in common with Sufis than with orthodox Hindus. The points of positive contact between the two traditions were at level of devotion where doctrines and philosophy seemed less important than honesty of worship, religious life and moral righteousness.

[2]G.S. Talib, "Guru Nanak and Sufism", *Journal of Religious Studies*, 1971, p. 42.

[3]K.A. Nizami, *Life and Times of Shaikh Farid Ganj-i-Shakar*, p. 36.

and non-Muslims in areas of North India.[1] In fact "Baba Farid's Sufistic response to the socio-politico moral degeneration of his day was that of stress on reformation—internal reformation in the sense of self purification and external reformation of Islamic dispensation in India by giving it a tolerant, liberal, humanistic orientation, thereby propagating a pluralistic trend of Islamic piety as against the predominant militant unitarian Muslim polity." It seems that Baba Farid was, by and large, not involved in conversions in the ordinary sense of transfer from one religion to another but more with conversions of inner self of man whom he made to realise the need of converting into and the necessity of following the path of spiritual upliftment, whatever be the religion to which one belonged. An important conversation relating to Hindus took place when Shaikh Nizam-ud-din Auliya was strolling with Amir Khusro on the roof of *jamat-khana* from where he sighted a group of Hindus at worship. Greatly impressed by the intensity of their devotion, he remarked to Amir Khusro that every community has its own path and faith and own way of worship. Forbearance and peaceful relations, not compulsions, should be inculcated where faith is involved.[2] It is true that as preachers Chishti saints were not reluctant to accept disciples from among the lower strata of Hindu society, but the inference that the Sufi message of egalitarianism led the members of lower caste Hindus *en masse* to accept and embrace Islam can amount to a generalization. If we accept the postulate that conversions were more common among the lower castes in Hindu society then the question arises why that should have happened more in cases of some lower castes such as weavers, washers, dyers, metal workers etc. but not in case of many others. It is obvious that conversions to Islam was a complex phenomenon linked with state policies, forced conversions, economic incentives, personal example and propaganda of Sufi saints as also regional variations.[3] Moreover, the socio-economic position of the converts was not always necessarily better than that of the Hindus. In that context, it may be reasonable to postulate that the Sufis were normally unconcerned with conversions and their significant achievement was to set up contacts with masses and to bind fellow human beings in bonds of love. The relative ineffectiveness of Islam as a religion in

[1]S.A.A. Rizvi, op. cit., p. 141.

[2]Ibid., p. 150.

[3]Harbans Mukhia, "Conversions to Islam in Punjab", *Proceedings of Punjab History Congress,* 1972. Prof. Mukhia has averred that the phenomenon of conversions should be studied only with relevance to the study of castes that embraced Islam, the agencies of conversions, the natives, the attitude of the ruling class towards proselytisation, the relationship of neo-converts to old Hindus, the changes in occupation of converts and the resultant social tensions etc.

India was attributed by Sufi *shaikhs* to lack of ethical superiority in Muslims themselves.[1] Thus it may be conceded that though the Muslim government had failed to provide a code of law giving equal status to non-Muslims, the Sufis showed a path of universal brotherhood (theoretically it was a part of Islam since its very inception). After all, the position which Islam had prescribed for non-Muslims was not practicable in India. It was the liberal outlook of Sufis like Baba Farid and Nizam-ud-din Auliya that helped in liquidating social and ideological barriers between different ethnic groups in India. According to Khushwant Singh "the most significant aspect of Sufism and one which had the greatest impact on people was the way of life adopted by Sufi leaders and their immediate disciples; whereas Muslim conquerors had tried to destroy their places of worship. Sufis welcomed them and embraced them as brothers."[2] Dr. Lajwanti Krishna has also portrayed all the medieval Sufi saints of Punjab as itinerant ambassadors of goodwill suggesting an all too convenient contrast between them and militant, exclusive, conversionary Muslims and *ulama*, though stalwarts of Islamic formalism.[3]

As a result of contact and interaction of two divergent religious patterns of Hinduism and Islam and due to the harmonizing role of the Sufis, Punjab had become the cradle of a cosmopolitan culture. It had become the seat of Muslim *walis* and saints who had been advocating the principles of *wahdat* (unity of godhead), *ukhuwat* (brotherhood) and *murawwat* (benediction and human consideration). Thus Sufis were like Nathayogis prominent in medieval Punjab and as such Nanak could not have ignored them. In the Sufi ideal, he found much that he himself stood for. Nevertheless, he did not resist reacting to whatever he found wrong amongst the Sufi *shaikhs*. McLeod would like us to believe that "Guru Nanak confined his contacts with only ordinary Muslims and not with the eminent Sufis."[4] Such an assertion is not valid for there is enough evidence to show that Nanak had visited the centres of various orders of Muslim spiritual leaders including those outside India,[5] with the urge in him to plead with Muslim orthodoxy to liberalize religion and religious life among their co-religionists. Nanak's contact with and necessity to preach to the people of Islamic countries must have given him, by acquisition or association with holy

[1]*Fawa'id-ul-Fu'ad*, pp. 102-3.
[2]Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs,* pp. 26-27.
[3]Lajwanti Krishna, *Punjabi Sufi Poets, AD 1460-1900,* p. 30.
[4]W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion,* p. 159.
[5]The Sufi saints of Pakpattan, Multan, Uchh had good relations with Nanak. He visited almost all important centres of Sufis in North India and outside India and Muslim countries like Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan.

men, maturity and experience and some basic knowledge and appreciation at least about Islam even if he was not highly educated in the Muslim theology and language. The fact is that Guru Nanak's contact was not confined to the ordinary Muslims. He had come in contact with Muslim scholars, Sufi saints and also Muslim nobles like Nawab Daulat Khan of Sultanpur and Rae Bular of Talwandi and many others in the course of his travels. In *Tawarikh-i-Punjab,* we find several names of Muslim *walis* and spiritualists whom Nanak visited.[1]

There are references in the *Janam Sakhis* about encounters between Nanak and eminent Sufis. Baba Nanak is said to have encountered, at various times, Rukn-ud-din Rattan Haji, Ibrahim Farid Sahi and Sharaf-ud-din.[2] Of these only Shaikh Ibrahim could have been a contemporary of Guru Nanak. With the exception of Rattan Haji, all appear in the *Puratan Janam Sakhis* where they are joined by Farid-ud-din Masud Ganj-i-Shakar and Baha-ud-din Zakaria[3] both of whom had long predeceased the birth of Nanak. Other *Janam Sakhis* add more names. Though *Janam Sakhis* accounts are not always reliable yet there seems to be little doubt in accepting a strong possibility of the accepted tradition that he had met Shaikh Ibrahim, descendant of Farid, at Pakpattan. Shaikh Farid's reputation and popularity was a powerful attraction. At Pakpattan, Guru Nanak is said to have listened to and shown appreciation for the verses of Farid. In him, Nanak found a message of universal love, spiritual experience of God, omnipotent and omniscient, which could be attained by supreme devotion, devoid of all ritualism and formalities of worship.

The reference to a visit to Multan also occurs in *Janam Sakhi* which describes the death of Baha-ud-din Zakaria, the Sufi *pir* of Multan.[4] Bhai Gurdas refers to an account where the Sufis of Multan are said to have made arrogant gestures when they heard of Guru Nanak's visit to their place. A cup filled to the brim with milk was sent to Nanak, the intention being to indicate to him that the city was already full with holy men. Guru Nanak laid a jasmine petal on the milk and returned it thereby proclaiming that there was still room for more.[5]

Rather than learn anything doctrinal from the Muslim *pirs,* Nanak sought to convince them about his own teachings. He took pains to

[1]Bute Shah, *Tawarikh-i-Punjab,* MSS. Punjab University Library, Patiala, p. 153.

[2]*Janam Sakhis*, B40, ff. 53a, 56a, 57b, 200a.

[3]*Puratan Janam Sakhi*, pp. 22, 40, 52, 82, 100, 104.

[4]Ibid., 55, p. 108.

[5]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 1, Pauri 44. The story is repeated in *Gyan Ratnavali Janam Sakhi,* 178, p. 508.

visit the Muslim spiritualists at their centres in order to explain to them his own message of universal brotherhood and oneness of mankind. Except for a very few Sufis like Baba Farid and descendants of Pir Baha-ud-din Zakaria, Guru Nanak had little respect of those *pirs* who claimed and pretended to have occult powers. Guru Nanak exhibited his contempt for arrogant *pirs* like Wali Kandhari of Hasan Abdal[1] and Hamza Gaus of Sialkot who were proud of their occult powers and knew little piety and humility. Guru Nanak was very critical of those Sufi *shaikhs* who managed to get social recognition through mass mobilisation rather than through genuine endeavour towards piety and humility. Dr Grewal has aptly said, "If the *qazis* had their offices, the *shaikhs* had their establishments, they treated the means as ends, forgetting that God alone is everlasting."[2] Guru Nanak vehemently attacked those Sufi *shaikhs* who were egoist and thought too much about themselves.[3] "Presuming to be sure of his own place of honour with God, the *shaikh* gave assurance to others as well, he was like a mouse which was itself too big for the whole and yet tied a winnowing basket (*chajj*) to its tail."[4] Many a *shaikh* subsisted on revenue free lands and distributed caps of honour among disciples.[5] Guru Nanak denounced the imposters, particularly the *qalandars,* who made a living out of religion and were a common sight in Punjab. The Chishti saints had themselves expressed regret about degeneration of incompetent *pirs.* "The one who could not swim himself, how could he lead others to swim; when blind lead the blind they all fall into the ditch." As with the Jogis so with the Sufis one could locate parallel existence of puritanical and degenerate elements and Guru Nanak showed awareness of both the genuine *shaikhs* worthy of commendation and the normal run of pretenders of spiritual piety.

Guru Nanak undoubtedly criticized[6] Sufis at several places but the condemnatory passages should not be taken as a general condemnation of Sufism as such. One does not find any thing of a polemical character against the Sufis in the compositions of Nanak. He was critical of only the negative aspects of the socio-religious culture of Sufism. He, in fact, showed respect for the noble souls among Muslim seekers of spiritual life without mentioning any one of them in particular.[7] Nanak

[1]Hasan Abdal is about 30 miles from Islamabad (Rawalpindi).
[2]J.S. Grewal, op. cit., p. 232.
[3]*Adi Granth*, p. 227.*Qazi Shaikh bhek fakira, Vadai kahavai, humai tan pira*
[4]*Adi Granth,* Var Malar, p. 1286.
[5]Grewal, op. cit., p. 232.
[6]*Adi Granth*, pp. 64, 143, 227.
[7]Ibid., p. 358.

states in Japji, that "Listening to God's name elevates one to the station of *shaikh, pir* and *patshah.*"[1] Guru Nanak had no fundamental difference with the Sufis and he commended their belief in divine monotheism, universal love, emphasis on egalitarianism and protest against ritualism which were similar to his own convictions.

Reiteration of themes similar to those dwelt upon by the Sufis are frequent in Guru Nanak's writings. For example, Guru Nanak urged that efforts to seek God in places of worship and centres of pilgrimages are futile. He is hidden within the searcher and only the true *guru* can direct one to the right path. Sufis too ask their disciples to seek Him in their own heart which according to them is the seat of divine grace. Guru Nanak's home is no different from Ghazali's and all the eminent Sufis lament their separation from that home. The Guru turns to the subject more forcefully. "Neither angels nor demons nor men, *sidhs* or seekers on earth shall remain. The Lord alone shall ever endure."[2] The above hymn is a profound commentary on the Quranic verse "every one on it passes away—and there endures for ever the person of the Lord, the Lord of glory and honour."[3]

Likewise, the story of Kaba moving in the direction in which Guru Nanak's feet were turned harks back to the Sufi belief that great saints need not circumambulate the Kaba; wherever they may be, the Kaba will appear before their eyes. In fact, the Sufis believe that eminent saints and holy men were recipient of divine greatness while the Kaba with its walls was only a building of stone or rubble.[4]

Guru Nanak's practical approach to piety, righteousness and honest labour brings him close to those Sufis who lived as petty cultivators, merchants or craftsmen. One of them was Shaikh Hamid-ud-din Nagauri who rejected all offers and lived by working on a small plot of land.[5] His successor Khwaja Hussain drove his own bullock-cart and looked after his fields himself.

Like the aforesaid Sufi saints, Guru Nanak held that "In the midst of work and household one is emancipated."[6] As a herdsman, as a farmer and as a store-keeper he shows the same attitude. "He alone, O, Nanak! knows the way who earneth by sweat of his brow and then shareth with others."[7] Like some of the popular Sufis, Nanak neither held the tendency to shun the world nor become too much engrossed

[1]Ibid., Japji, p. 3.
[2]Ibid., p. 143.
[3]*Quran*, LV, 26.
[4]Cf. S.A.A. Rizvi, op. cit., p. 388.
[5]Cf. Ibid., p.270.
[6]*Adi Granth*, p. 661.
[7]Ibid., p. 1191.

in it.[1] Guru Nanak, like the Sufi saints, believed in the organic fusion of the spiritual and worldly life and of worship with fulfilment of social obligations, a community life based on work and sharing of what is earned with others, a congregational mode of worship; *sama* or musical gatherings of Sufis were parallel to Sikh *satsang*.

Guru Nanak's organization of *sangats* or community living was basically like the *khanqah* of Sufi orders.[2] Since there was no analogous development either in the fold of orthodox Hinduism or any of the sects founded by any other medieval *bhakta,* the establishment of *sangats* and the nomination of the successor by Guru Nanak indicates that he was conscious as also perhaps influenced by the organizational aspect of Sufi-social culture. The Sufi *shaikh* would invariably nominate his spiritual heir, bequeath to him personal *khirga* and staff. The succession was not hereditary but nomination was by merit. Nanak too, appears to have attached great importance to the absolute criterion of merit by nominating Lehna, his successor.[3] An important fact that need to be emphasized is that rise of Sufism in Islam and Sikhism in Hinduism faced reactions of similar character from the orthodoxy of their parent religious tradition. The Sufi movement was not confined to an awakening of the religious conscience of the individual but, avoiding association with politics, it implied from the very beginning nevertheless, a protest against the socio-political abuses condoned by official *ulama.* The bolder the expressions of Sufis, the stronger the reactions they evoked from the orthodox theologians. Likewise, as socio-religious implications of Nanak's revolutionary programme became manifest, the alienation and opposition of Hindu Brahminical order too became marked. We may, however, be alert in noting that whereas Sufism remained respectfully crystallized as a mystical dimension of orthodox Islam, Sikhism took on an autonomous status as a full-fledged religion and did not exhaust itself as a sect of the parent faith, Hinduism.

An analysis of similarities traced in the teachings of Nanak and those of the Sufis should not be construed as an assertion that the

[1]Some Nirguna saints like Kabir, Raidas and Dadu led a similar life, working as weaver, cobbler or cotton carder, earning their own livelihood but profoundly engrossed in meditation.

[2]Here we have an ideal that is logical in itself, almost universal. Men who share religious belief and way of social life inevitably devise an organised community life; *vihara, math, ashrama,* Sufi *khanqah* or for that the matter Sikh *sangat* represent characteristic similarities as well as differences of community living.

[3]The right to nominate a successor goes with the office of Guru and it is immaterial whether the nominated successor is from amongst the disciples of Guru or from members of Guru's family. See Bhai Gurdas,*Var* 1, Pauri 45.

former was consciously borrowing his thought pattern from the latter. It is difficult to agree with Tara Chand that "Nanak was seeped in Sufi-lore."[1] Affinities certainly exist but it cannot be stated categorically that they are necessarily the result of Sufi influence. The possibility is perhaps that Guru Nanak, through his deep meditation and search for self-realization, arrived at the same conclusions as had been reached by Sufi mystics.

A very conspicuous feature of religious climate of Punjab in Nanak's age was cross fertilization of the mystic ideas of Sufis and the followers of Hathayoga. The points of resemblance and contact between the Jogis and Sufis have been stressed by many scholars.[2] In a very interesting paper Simon Digby has studied the close contacts between Jogis and Sufis and enumerates three varieties of anecdotes concerning encounters between Jogis and Sufi *pirs*. These are: (i) plain anecdotes of the voluntary conversion of Jogis followed by their attainment of a high station of the Sufi path, (ii) anecdotes of magic contests leading to the subjugation and conversion of the Jogi, again usually followed by the attainment of a high Sufi station, and (iii) anecdotes of magic contest and conversion which have a regional significance in that the Jogi is displaced as the locumtenens of a sacred or otherwise desirable site by the Sufi *shaikh*. Professing Islam and attaining a Sufi station, the Jogi is accommodated in a subordinate capacity on the same holy site, or as an esteemed member of the *shaikh's* entourage.[3] It must be stressed that just as encounters with Sufi *pirs* testify to the extent of Sufi influence, so in a like manner do the Natha discourses bear witness to Natha influence in the Punjab of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

As a matter of fact the prominent Chishti Sufi of Punjab, Shaikh Farid-ud-din Ganj-i-Shakar, is the first Muslim saint about whose contacts with Hindu religious thinkers and discussions with them we have clear and definite information. Hindu Jogis used to visit his *khanqah* very frequently and the inmates some times discussed interesting problems with them.[4] A disciple of Shaikh Farid is said to have asked a Jogi who was a guest in *khanqah* to prescribe him a herb for growing long

[1]Tara Chand, op. cit., p. 151.

[2]Alberuni had noticed Sufi parallels in *Yogasutra* of Patanjali, See *Alberuni's India*, tr. E.C. Sachau, p. 55. For a discussion of the influence of Natha doctrine upon Sufis see S.A.A. Rizvi, "Sufis and Natha-Yogis in Medieval Northern India, XII-XVI Centuries", *Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia*, VII, nos. 1 & 2, 1970, pp. 119-33.

[3]Simon Digby, "Encounters with Sufis in Indian Sufi Hagiography", a paper presented in a symposium on Aspects of Religion in South Asia, School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

[4]K.A. Nizami, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

hair,[1] Shaikh Nizam-ud-din Auliya once made a frank admission that he had appreciated one particular observation made by a Jogi.[2] In fact, *Malfuzat* i.e., collection of discourses of various Sufi saints, suggest that there was a continuous contact between Sufis and Nathayogis. Sufi *shaikhs* often appreciate complete devotion of Jogis to God and noticed parallels between Sufi theosophy and yoga.[3]

Discussions on the concept of ultimate Reality enhanced mutual respect of Nathas and Sufis. The knowledge of some Indian Sufis such as Shaikh Abdul Quddus and other *pirs* was not limited to understanding and practising *pranayam* (breath control). The Shaikh's *Rushdnama*[4] which consists of his own verses and those of his *pirs* identifies Sufi beliefs based on *wahdat-ul-wujud* with the philosophy of Gorakhnath. To both the Nathas and Shaikh Abdul Quddus, *sabad* stands for an undefinable divine word and for both the most important comprehension of *sabad* is to make the Truth dwell in the heart through contemplation. The Shaikh exhorts Sufis to meditate on the true name and warned the *ulama* that they were selling knowledge in turn for living and would not achieve *marifat.*[5] In the same strain, Shaikh Abdul Quddus warns Jogis that wearing rings in their ears and rosaries of ganister around their neck and recitation of *sakhis* (Natha poetry) are not enough to make one a true yogi.[6] Similarly, Gorakh regarded these as means to impress the world and not true yoga. According to him, the Ultimate Reality could not be conceived by logical reasoning; it was a supersensuous, superintellectual, direct experience in the state of *samadhi* or perfectly illuminated state of consciousness in which the subject-object relation vanishes and consciousness realises itself as perfectly identified with Absolute Reality. The *Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati* of Natha literature demonstrates the relationship between Advaita (non-dualism) and Dvaita (dualism) by using the analogy of water bubbles, familiar to that used by Sufis in the *wahdat-ul-wujud* system. Bubbles appear at the surface of water, then both bubbles and water appear merged with each other, the changing multiplicity of bubbles fails to separate them from water.[7]

A very important common denominator that characterized the process of interaction between Sufi and Natha Jogis was that the language of

[1]Most of the Jogis maintained practical interest in herbs and Sujan Rai mentions efficacy of medicines administered by the Jogis, *Khulast-ut-Tawarikh,* p. 22.

[2]*Fawa'id-ul-Fu'ad,* p. 49.

[3]*Siyar-ul-Auliya,* p. 444.

[4]See *Rushdanama* or *Alakhbani,* Hindi tr., ed.Rizvi and Zaidi.

[5]Ibid., p. 32.

[6]Ibid., p. 38.

[7]S.A.A. Rizvi, op. cit., p. 334.

instruction was popular local dialects which had direct appeal to the common masses. The religious and poetic language of the Jogis and Sufis reflects their environment. Simon Digby[1] has noted "The expression of religious ideas must depend largely on the linguistic tradition in which they are put forth." Since the discussions between Baba Farid and the Jogis usually took place in the earliest form of Urdu i.e. Hindawi, the *khanqah* of Baba Sahib became one of the earliest cradles of the Urdu language.[2] Moreover, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries most of the songs recited at *sama*[3] gatherings of the Sufis were in Hindawi. Though earlier Sufis had expressed their metaphysical and devotional attitude in Persian but later use of Hindawi was a significant factor for popularity and arousal of Hindu and yogic interest in Sufism.[4]

In their encounters with the Sufis, the Jogis did not seem to have suffered from any feeling of inferiority and at times made claims which provoked resentment in Sufi circles. However, the very non-conformism of the Nathayogis, their concept of monotheism of Parama-Shiva (in practice, however, some lesser divinities found place in Gorakhnath shrines), there bias against caste and Hindu rituals and the intense, interior vision of the ineffable God made social contacts with the Sufis easy for them. On the whole, in Punjab, the Sufis and Jogis seem to have co-existed in relative peace, each group confidently regarding the other as an inferior and somewhat misguided variety of its own kind and both enjoying veneration of common folk (who often perhaps could not distinguish between them, for *mahants* of Jogis were also called *pirs*). It seem that Jogis did manage well in their dealings with the Muslim establishment down to a late period and

[1]Simon Digby, Review of McLeod's "Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion" in *Indian Economic and Social History Review,* 7:2, 1970, p. 311.

[2]Maulavi Abdul Haqq, *The Sufi Works in Early Development of Urdu Language,* pp. 5-7.

[3]*Sama* is listening to singing of Sufi verses accompanied by dance and music. Al-Hujwari in his *Kashf-ul-Mahajub* discussed the problem of permissibility of *sama* with an obvious hesitation. In spite of opposition of the *ulama* and Suhrawardi Sufis who did not encourage it, it had become the popular feature of the Chishti order, and *shaikhs* emphasised the efficacy of audition parties (*sama*) in the development of spiritual personality. Music, they said, not only relieved strain on man's emotions but quickened his emotional response and attuned his heart to the Infinite and the Eternal.

[4]The use of Hindawi devotional poetry in the *sama* or musical gathering of the Chishti saints had reached such a point by fifteenth century that a writer Abdul Wahid Bilgrami had to justify it by providing Sufi allegorical meanings to such terms as "Udho", "Murli", "Gopis", "Rasalila" etc. Abdul Wahid Bilgrami's *Haqa'iq-i-Hindi,* tr., S.A.A. Rizvi.

even the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb had confidence in their magic and science of alchemy.[1]

In the light of aforesaid discussion, it is clear that the religious setting of Punjab when Guru Nanak appeared on the scene offered a panorama of faiths and as such there was a great diversity in religious beliefs and practices among the people of Punjab. Notwithstanding frequent military activity that went on its soil, medieval Punjab nurtured and developed different cultural and mystic traditions and the process of interaction imparted a peculiar charm to its history. The intermingling and interaction of beliefs belonging to Hindus, yogic cults and Sufis had been fairly well advanced in Guru Nanak's time and he was aware of many expressions of religion which he encountered, particularly such forms as had affected the mass of population of Punjab. Similarities between different forms of faith were occasionally recognised and appreciated. Moreover, often the reciprocal exchange resulted not simply in modification of existing traditions but in the emergence of a recognizable synthesis and new pattern which in various respects strongly resembled others but in its wholeness corresponded to none of them. Yet despite mutual appreciation and give and take of ideas, the influences were peripheral, not touching the core. The creeds, their metaphysics, cosmology and what may be called their mythological world of references, and their historical background did not and could not undergo any change. However, notwithstanding the peripheral nature of interaction, one need not deny the fact that respective religious forms were at work and did shape the contemporary thought pattern. It were the eclectic, harmonizing and synthesizing trends of mystic movements that helped in liquidating social, ideological and linguistic barriers between different groups. Moreover, the growth of liberal trends, as William A. Graham has aptly said, "was mirrored in the immensely creative and fervent surge of religious devotionalism (call it *bhakti* or *tasawwuf*) exemplified in the lives and teachings of countless Indian saints and reformers at the level of everyday life in the villages and towns."[2]

[1]It is well known that Jogis were experts in alchemy. A curious document printed in the *Mughals and Jogis of Jakhbar* by B.N. Goswami and J.S. Grewal, is a letter from Emperor Aurangzeb sending an offering to *mahant* of Jogi shrine and asking for a second dose of magically treated quick silver, p. 126.

[2]William A. Graham, "The Devotional Movement and Subsequent Crystallisation of Communities in India", *The Journal of Religious Studies,* vol. IX, 1982, p. 35.

Ishtiaq Qureshi's assessment deserves mention, "Akbar's religious beliefs as embodied in Din-i-Ilahi would have been historically unimportant if they had concerned simply the idiosyncracies of an imperial mind; they are, however, important because they represent the culmination of trends which had been active in the life of the community for sometime", see I.H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent.* p.187.

Side by side with eclectic tendencies of the spiritual movements which achieved a major breakthrough in articulating the quest of the age for a new spiritual anchor, there were negative influences that corroded the socio-religious fabric. It has been said that the rules developed by the human society for its protection soon become fetters and hamper its development and lead to its degeneration. Nowhere perhaps is this more true than in the field of religion. Even a casual reader of Guru Nanak's hymns can have an idea of the atmosphere of insecurity, helplessness and tragic overtones of religious decadence where form had totally supplanted the spirit. We do not know anything definite about the precursors of Nanak in Punjab. Though it has been suggested that the echo of Kabir's teachings had reached the land of the five rivers, "it may be readily conceded that even in the time of Kabir and Nanak, orthodoxy both among the Hindus and Muslims, remained committed to the socio-religious order upheld for centuries. To minimize their strength would be to misjudge the age."[1] Both Hinduism and Islam had degenerated into a set of formalities and ceremonials and according to Guru Nanak both the communities had been oblivious to the substantial tenets of their respective religions and had been adhering to false and unreligious practices. No wonder the behavioural aspect of religion lacked the kind of sustenance and support needed to put new life and vigour into body social of the people of Punjab. In the language of Guru Nanak, "Religion has taken wings and vanished. Falsity prevails like the darkness of the darkest night. The moon of truth is visible nowhere. The seed of religion has exhausted its merit with the departure of those who had sown it."[2] For the Hindu community religious authority rested in the Brahmins who had become corrupt and covetous. They would give in charity money they had acquired by sinful means.[3] Guru Nanak's disillusionment with the religious decadence is evident from the numerous utterances. Thus, for example, he says in one of his hymns "The chariot of Kaliyug is made of passion and it is driven by falsehood."[4] Again, "There are millions of fools fallen in the depth of utter darkness, millions of thieves subsisting on the earning of others, there are millions of false and the wicked."[5] Guru Nanak was equally aware of the diversity of religious cults and practices. According to him "There are many dogmas, there are many systems, there are many scriptural revelations, many modes to fetter the mind. The saint seeks for release

[1]J.S. Grewal, op. cit., p. 138.
[2]*Adi Granth,* Var Majh, p. 145.
[3]Ibid., Var Ramkali, p. 951.
[4]Ibid., Rag Majh, p. 145.
[5]Ibid., Rag Asa, p. 466.

through the truth, but the truth is nowhere to be found. Falsehood prevails and in the darkness of Kaliyug men have become ghosts."[1]

Like the Hindus, the Muslims too had recourse to formal and futile practices. They often ran to dead and living saints for the fulfilment of desires and believed in miracles and magic. Guru Nanak was dissatisfied with the behaviour of Muslim religious leaders and censures them in several hymns. "Thou utterest falsehood yet thou goeth to admonish others, cheated thyself thou now cheateth thy companion. Nanak sayeth is this the sort of guide thou appearest."[2] Amir Khusro finds that the only distinguishing feature of theologians as a class was their hypocrisy, vanity and conceit. He sums up the whole position in a sentence by declaring that the respect paid to the *ulama* was purely through the force of convention and that if merit were to decide the measure of social honour, the laity was a thousand times better than priesthood.[3] There was almost universal trait of bribe taking, of which very few *qazis* were free. Guru Nanak says, "The one who has become a *qazi* sits to administer justice. Taking bribes he gives injustice. If his advice is sought, he trudles out some quotations."[4] Again, "The *qazi* tells lies and eats filth."[5] Thus, there was an evident decline in the religious life of both Hindus and Muslims of Punjab. Also common to both was the beginning of its criticism and search for inner personal faith. Though in Punjab there was a comparatively loose rigour of orthodoxy and caste due to impact of Islam and process of interaction, conditions, on the whole, were far from satisfactory. Bhai Gurdas portrays the advent of Guru Nanak taking place in a gloomy setting. His description of the contemporary milieu stresses the point that the dominance of religion by authoritarian priesthood was a phenomenon then common to both the communities of Hindus and Muslims. Brahmins and *mullahs* squabbled endlessly and the truth was passed by, none ever gained liberation thus. Discord made in the name of religion disrupted and devitalised society. All were lost in superstitiousness.[6] In fact Punjab at the time of advent of Guru Nanak had pledged its faith to fakirs, jogis, sadhus, mendicants of a variety of sects and descriptions, fortune telling Rawals, begging Muslim *qalandars* and Tantrics, most of whom were unscrupulous. Most of these groups sank into pure parasitism, sacked the countryside, exacted from the people their daily subsistence and impressed upon the masses a fatalistic view of life. The religious

[1]Ibid., p. 468.
[2]Ibid., p. 953.
[3]K.M. Ashraf, op. cit., p. 68.
[4]*Adi Granth*, p. 951.
[5]Ibid., p. 662.
[6]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 1, Pauris 7-12.

path propagated by the Jogis provided an easy pretext to the people for not facing the responsibilities of life and supplied them with a justification to neglect their social obligations. The Jogi vowed that he would not earn his living and would instead beg his food. He expected the social system to maintain him through the alms people gave him. Thus, on his part, he felt no need of earning his livelihood and shouldering any responsibility to the society. Guru Nanak was conversant with various expressions of religious decadence which he encountered, particularly the Jogis who were a dominant religious group as far as they had affected the mass of population of Punjab. Nanak, therefore, reacted vehemently to the anti-social and ascetical influence of yoga, for Sikhism is unremitting in its insistence upon disciplined spirituality accompanied by a strong sense of social responsibility.

In retrospect, it is clear that Guru Nanak emerged as a religious leader when the climate of Punjab was marked by plurality of religious context by a give and take, intermingling and interaction of beliefs belonging to Hindu, Jogi and Sufi traditions. The process in that direction had been fairly well advanced by Nanak's times. It is clear from his own eclectic approach that he imbibed in full the entire religious atmosphere of his age in that respect. However, he was equally conscious of the limitations of both Hindus and Muslims and reacted against the negative influence of both the religious traditions. In fact one can envisage a Punjab deeply interested in religious issues and many people could find little comfort from ministrations of the priestly class and were looking for spiritual enlightenment. The moment was ripe for the emergence of a charismatic leader who could wipe out the indignity and rouse the conscience of man. It is in this context that Bhai Gurdas places the advent of Guru Nanak:

> *Satgur Nanak pragatia,*
> *miti dhund jag chanan hoia.*
> (With the appearance of Nanak, the true Guru, the haze (of ignorance and falsehood) has vanished and the world is illumined with effulgence.)

Guru Nanak was to usher in the Bhakti movement in Punjab. He not only delegitimized contemporary religious ethos, but also suggested remedial measures for ameliorating the present as well as future religious life of the people. He formulated a new religion and the fact that he laid the foundation of a community shows that he was keen to provide a vehicle for the continuation of his message.

2

Guru Nanak and the Foundation of Sikh Religion

The advent of Guru Nanak as a *bhakti* saint in medieval Punjab marked the emergence of a new religion. The innovative religious forces represented by the Nirguna *bhaktas* found their fullest expression in Guru Nanak and, at the same time, received from him a definite direction and affirmation. While he took cognizance of various contemporary religions and drew his terminologies and symbols from Hinduism and Islam, his religious vision had a refreshing and emphatic quality of its own. He constantly evaluated contemporary religious beliefs and practices and boldly rejected all that he considered wrong. He disdained picking up others' fruits and laid his own seeds, thereby carving out a religious vision which had its own transcendent and dynamic character.

While drawing much from the Nirguna trend of medieval *bhaktas*, his religion signalled a departure from the contemporary religious ethos in many significant ways. His hymns bring out clearly his distinct thought pattern not only in its theological concept but also in its socio-political outlook.

The legends about the lives of saints and religious founders normally occupy a central place in virtually all sects and major religions. The life of Guru Nanak too has been considerably embellished with miracles and legends. McLeod in his analysis of Guru Nanak's biographic profile and faith notes that legends do have significance since they "serve to communicate, in some measure, an impression of the power (of great religious figures) to attract and inspire", yet he adds that in his own study, "legend must wherever possible be identified and set aside" since "the strict, at times ruthless, approach is as much required in a quest of the historical Nanak as it had been required in the quest of historical Jesus."[1] Commonly styled as "biographies of Guru Nanak", various *Janam Sakhis* purport to narrate the events of Guru Nanak's life in a series of hagiographic anecdotes. The medieval biographers

[1]W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, p. 8.

of Nanak were essentially his devotees who tried to deify him and propagate his faith by introducing numerous fables and myths into their accounts. No wonder they are highly unsatisfactory as reliable historical sources and McLeod adopted a set of basically consistent criteria for separating true from false passages, accepting those biographical details which can be regarded as probable, while discarding the improbables.[1] Whether based on historical facts or not the biographical *Janam Sakhi*[2] legends are a vital source for Nanak's followers and form a part of their religious faith and social ideology. Edward Armstrong in a biography of Saint Francis demonstrated that the lineaments of a particular saint can only be discerned "through the rosy mists of hagiographical adulteration."[3] The several *Janam Sakhis* of Guru Nanak too contain a wealth of information which helps in reconstructing Nanak's life and religion, the contemporary social context, and reflects social and moral values of Nanak's followers during the seventeenth century. The "*Janam Sakhis* are thus a collection of anecdotes, strung together to form rudimentary chronologies", all selected and interpreted, of course, through the one pointed eye of faith in Guru Nanak as God's descendant to demonstrate the way of salvation to an erring mankind.

Bhai Gurdas,[4] the most eminent contemporary figure in Sikh learning and piety, is regarded as the most important characterizer of the role of Guru Nanak. The *Vars* (ballads) and *Kabits* (couplets) written by Bhai Gurdas (1551-1639) to expound the Sikh way of life contain references to Guru Nanak, often in the form of eulogy. But if we were to exclude portions which deal directly with the life of Guru Nanak[5] his account is illuminating. The testimony of Bhai Gurdas is taken to be exact and regarded as the "Key to the *Guru Granth Sahib.*" Because of his intimate contact with Guru Nanak's successors and with some of the important Sikhs of his time, Bhai Gurdas's judgement about the

[1]Ibid., pp. 68-69.

[2]Notable among the *Janam Sakhis* are those of *Puratan* and *Bala* traditions, *Adi Sakhi,* and the so-called *Janam Sakhi,* B40 and *Meharban Sakhi.* For a detailed discussion of the *Janam Sakhis* see W.H. McLeod, *Early Sikh Tradition* and idem, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion.*

[3]Edward A. Armstrong, *Saint Francis—Nature, Mystic*, p. 218.

This book marks a major advance in understanding the process of legend formation as it has evolved within religious communities.

[4]Bhai Gurdas was a nephew of third Guru Amardas and a contemporary of the three Gurus that followed him. For his work, refer to *Varan Bhai Gurdas*, ed. Hazare Singh and Vir Singh.

[5]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 1, 23-35; 11, 13-23. For an English translation of these stanzas see Ganda Singh ed., *Sources on the Life and Teachings of Guru Nanak*, pp. 33-44.

religious and social significance of the Guru's mission and formation of the faith arising from it, is penetrating for he interpreted and conceptualized the aspects of the developing Sikh faith in a manner both significant and authentic.

The earliest known account of Guru Nanak in a non-Sikh source came a century after him. It was in *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*,[1] a remarkable book in Persian on the religions and manners of the different races written by Mobid Zulfiqar Ardastani, a Parsi scholar and traveller. His discerning description of the Sikh faith is given under the title "Nanak Panthis" i.e. followers of Nanak's path. He noticed the specific features of the new order and was quick in perceiving the deep erosion that Sikhism had made in the cultural citadel of Brahminism. The treatment of the later Gurus in *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* is more historical. His personal friendship with the sixth Guru Hargobind and his intimate connections with the learned among the Sikhs had placed him in an extremely advantageous position to study from close quarters Sikhism and its growth. He appreciated the Sikh belief that Guru Nanak's spirit was transmitted to his successors and how they were not to be distinguished apart from him. The accounts of Guru Nanak in any of the later Persian works such as *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh* by Sujan Rai Bhandari,[2] *Siyar-ul-Muta'akhkhirin* by Ghulam Husain Khan,[3] *Tawarikh-i-Sikhan*[4] by Khushwaqt Rai, "Zikr-i-Guruan wa Ibtida-i-Singhan wa Mazhab-i-Eshan"[5] by Ahmed Shah Batala and *Tawarikh-i-Punjab*[6] by Bute Shah add little to the outline of Nanak's life derivable from *Janam Sakhis* and account of Bhai Gurdas. It is, however, the Guru's own word preserved in the *Guru Granth Sahib* that remains by far the most important primary source for understanding Guru Nanak and it is vital to our appreciation of his personality and teachings that we let his words speak direct to us without the *Janam Sakhi* gloss.

[1]The *Dabistan* or School of Manners was translated in England by David Shea and Anthony Troyer in 1843. Most of the sections dealing with Nanakpanthis has been translated with elaborate annotation by Ganda Singh and published in the *Journal of Indian History*, August 1940. The portion of translation dealing specifically with Guru Nanak also appears in the *Punjab Past and Present*, April, 1967.

[2]Written in 1698, the portion relating to the Sikhs was translated into Punjabi by Ganda Singh and published in *Phulwari*, Lahore, Oct., 1931.

[3]Written in 1780, the entire manuscript was translated into English by a Frenchman named M. Raymond and published in 1789.

[4]Written in 1811 for Colonel David Ochtergony of the East India Company troops by the company's official newswriter.

[5]The section on the Sikhs is from a larger manuscript *Tawarikh-i-Hind* written in 1818.

[6]Written in 1848, this is history of Punjab from the earliest times to the disintegration of the Sikh Empire.

From the investigations of historians and researchers the factual traits of Guru Nanak's personality are well established. His era is no more remote than five centuries ago. His followers cherish the immediacy of his presence with a rare faith and fidelity. Guru Nanak was born in AD1469 in a small village called Talwandi (now known as Nanakana Sahib), forty-five miles south-west of Lahore. His father Kalyan Chand of the Bedi clan of the Kshatriyas was the village accountant and kept rent records of the estate of the local Muslim landlords. Even as a small boy, Nanak was inquisitive beyond his age. Later he was married to Sulakhani and employed as an officer-in-charge of the provisions stores in the service of the Nawab of Sultanpur. At the age of thirty, he gave up his job and embarked upon a long itinerary as a roving monk. His long and laborious journeys were not intended as pilgrimages or casual tours; rather, he seemed to have travelled far and wide to obtain personal acquaintance with as many recognized centres of spiritual life as he could. Even if one is sceptic of the evidence of *Janam Sakhis,* Guru Nanak was admittedly a much travelled man. For about 20 years, he wandered through the length and breadth of India, and also visited neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka, Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan. He came in contact with the religious leaders of various sects and denominations, held endless discussions and disputations with the Siddhas, Vaishnavas, Sannyasis and Sufis of various orders. Loftiness of his mind and depth of his spiritual awareness had made Nanak impervious to theological arguments and squabblings. Like Kabir, he could hear to all that the holy men had to say, yet kept his own counsel.[1]

He had imbibed the entire socio-religious atmosphere of his times. As his understanding of the Supreme Being matured, Guru Nanak experienced enlightenment and self-realization which gave him a stronger conviction and he felt endowed with a sort of divine inspiration. As a result of wide ranging and persistent travels, elements of a new spiritual and social creativity began to take shape in Nanak's mind. Thus in the final phase of his life in the early 1520s, he settled at Kartarpur with his family as a householder. It was here that he systematized his creed to essentials and gave it a social expression. Before his death in 1539, Nanak nominated Lehna as his successor, to carry on his work. The nomination of a successor was crucial for the continuation of his teachings as well as an indication of how Nanak had visualized an enduring system. By establishing a regular recognized succession within

[1]A popular couplet attributed to Kabir is applicable to Nanak as well.
'Mix well with all, meet all, take name from all.
To all and, everyone say yes-yes, but dwell in your own village.'
See C. Vaudeville, *Kabir*, p. 118.

the new community, Nanak provided an effective apostolic continuity in the leadership.

The image of Guru Nanak in the light of his compositions and history is different from the image of a saint teaching the secrets of an esoteric wisdom or a recluse meditating upon God away from life and society or an armchair philosopher or a leader of political revolution. Guru Nanak was a messenger of God, a prophet whose task was to urge people of different religious denominations to give up their evil practices, to develop virtues and to infuse in them a spirit of piety, love and devotion, through sincere submission to God, worship and remembrance and through sustained effort and continuous struggle. He prepared his followers to withstand every temptation, not to withdraw from the struggle nor to bend to aggression and injustice. Guru Nanak was the bearer of good tidings of victory and happiness for the righteous and a warner of evil consequences for the wicked; a teacher of truth, educator of morals and an activist social reformer and a revolutionist whose mission was to organize a new society and build a new order on principles of justice and equality as alternative norms to caste or creed. Besides all this, he was a loving husband, an affectionate father, a lover of humanity and a great spokesman of purposeful and peaceful inter-faith dialogue. To crown it all he was, first and last, an humble servant of God.

The beginnings of the Sikh faith go back to the revelation brought to light by Guru Nanak. Perhaps Nanak is the first Indian religious teacher who claimed that he spoke as a witness to divine revelation and found himself to be performing a duty divinely laid upon him. At this stage it becomes relevant to know that revelation is the imparting to man of divinely authenticated truth, "revelation is the word of God, communicated to man by a divine voice or through mystic intuition and directly revealed on the heart." Since God personally never appears as a human being he chooses any living being as a medium for His revelation, and since revelation takes place for the benefit of mankind, so it is man who is to receive the revelation. With reference to Islam, Abdul Haq Ansari says, "Recipients of God's *wahy* (revelation), according to *Quran*, are angels or spirits and human messengers and prophets."[1] Islam is a religion that was revealed to Prophet Mohammad. It is stated in the *Quran* itself: "It was not (vouchsafed) to any mortal that Allah should speak to him unless (it be) by revelation or from behind a veil or that (He) sendth a messenger to reveal what He will by His leave."[2] A prophet is, therefore, a man not God and what distinguished

[1]Abdul Haq Ansari, "Revelation", *Journal of Religious Studies*, Autumn 1971, p. 80.

[2]*Quran*, XXVII, 51.

him from other mortals is that he is the recipient of a divine revelation which he propagates to his people according to his experience and capability. "Say I am only a mortal like you. My Lord inspireth in me that your God is only one God."[1] Prophet Mohammad's utterances make it emphatic that he is communicating divine word. Thus he proclaimed, "It is God who has sent down clear revelation to his servant that he may bring you forth from darkness to light."[2] Again, "He inspired his servant with what he does inspire."[3]

The fact of divine revelation which forms the backbone of Islam is upheld by Sikh tradition as well. The Sikhs believe that God sent Guru Nanak to bring comfort to the world and that it was by His grace that the Guru was able to deliver the instructions revealed to him.[4] The *banis* of Guru Nanak give the impression that he too believed that he was performing a divinely assigned task. Nanak does not make any direct claim to divinity but he repeatedly attributes all his utterances and doings directly to the biddings of God's command. In one of his verses, he said, "As the Lord sends the word so do I deliver it."[5] At another place he says, "I am completely dumb as I am, I communicate only the command from above."[6] For understanding the logic of Nanak's revelation two assumptions are important, "Firstly, there is a level of reality higher than the empirical, secondly that higher reality reveals itself to man to enlighten him." Repeated references in the *banis* of Guru Nanak indicate that he was in direct communion with God and he preached what had been taught by the Lord Himself. Thus Sikhism falls under the category of 'Revealed religions' which was given to mankind by prophet Guru Nanak who directly received it from God and passed it on to mankind in the form it was received from God.[7]

It is in fact the *Janam Sakhis* which have served as the vehicle of a powerful myth which holds that Baba Nanak was the divinely commissioned giver of salvation. The *Janam Sakhis* almost unanimously describe the religious experience of Nanak as one of divine revelation. Thus: "As God willed, Nanak, his devotee, was escorted to His presence. Then a cup filled with the liquid of immortality was given to him, accompanied by the command—"Nanak, pay attention. This is the cup of holy adoration of my Name. Drink it—I am with thee and thou do I bless and exalt. Go rejoice in my Name and preach it to others—

[1]Ibid., XXVIII, 11.
[2]Ibid., LVII, 9.
[3]Ibid., LIII, 1.
[4]Bhai Gurdas, *Var*, Pauri 23.
[5]*Adi Granth*, Rag Tilang, p. 723.
[6]Ibid., p. 722.
[7]Ibid., p. 566.

let this be thy calling."[1] Nanak himself refers to this assignment with deep gratitude. "I, a jobless ministerial, was assigned a rewarding task."[2] The question of divinity of Baba Nanak raised in the *Janam Sakhis*[3] is upheld by the Sikh scriptures and community from the very beginning. There is no doubt that the refrain has sunk deeply into the psyche of Sikhs and commands a wide acceptance. At the same time, doubts have been cast by some in this context. For example, according to Sher Singh, "there are many hymns which express unity, equality and identity of Guru with God but these are mystic expressions and not positive assertions to put forward a definite theory."[4] The general tendency to put a halo of divinity around the founders of religions influenced the followers of Guru Nanak, who did not allow him to remain at human level. The modern scientific criterion would be to regard Guru Nanak as a man who, improved and enlightened by his self-realization, discovered the spiritual truth and felt endowed with a sort of inner mandate to transmit truth and guide the people. For Sikhs, Guru is the holy teacher, the prophet under direct commission from God to set mankind on the path of righteousness.

If Sikh faith is to be studied dispassionately as a subject of academic interest, it should be first understood in its religious parameters and though it had its own sociological and political dimensions also, the core of Guru Nanak's teachings would be his religious beliefs and theological concepts. Some scholars hold the Sikh faith as a thoroughly mystical creed. Mohan Singh Oberoi remarks, "I would say Sikhism is all mysticism. Sikhism is to be defined as a deliberately cultivated life-long attitude of discipline-ship with a sense of transcendence and identity."[5] The nature of communication that the pioneers of spiritual faiths have held is most often mystical born of inner illumination of the spirit. It may be admitted that the source of Guru Nanak's beliefs was his mystical experience, but it is difficult to believe that what he imparted through his teachings was only mystic creed. The mystic experience is marked by the realization on the part of the mystic that he has attained the universal truth. Simultaneously, it dawns upon him that this spatio-temporal world is unreal, a mere appearance, which he often calls as illusion or delusion. This form of mystic experience which is often marked by philosophy of withdrawal from the world

[1]*Janam Sakhi*, B 40 (India Office Library MS Panj. B 40), F, 120b.

[2]*Adi Granth*, Var Majh, p. 150.

[3]Guru Nanak himself never contemplated any claim to divinity but the *Janam Sakhis* identify Baba Nanak with God, a unique and perfect manifestation of the timeless one. See *Janam Sakhi*, B 40, F 152a. *Adi Sakhi*, p. 91.

[4]Sher Singh, *Philosophy of Sikhism*, p. 71.

[5]Mohan Singh Oberoi, *Sikh Mysticism*, p. 17.

does not accord with the nature of Nanak's realization of the ultimate truth. He in fact was a mystic who continued to perceive the world with his physical senses as a multiplicity of objects, but saw these objects transfigured in such a manner that the unity shines through them. This is the nuclear point of his philosophy of contemplation sustained by a sense of social commitment. His realization of the authenticity of phenomenal world and man's positive role in it goes much beyond a technique of strictly cultivated mysticism that aims at individual salvation alone. Rather, wide humanism constituted an integral part of his ethical vision. In fact Guru Nanak gives us neither a metaphysical-mystical philosophy nor a scholastic vision but a prophecy, an entire scheme of conduct of life in which belief, thought and social action are in harmony. His teachings emphasize the inescapable relationship with social action without which a spiritual seeker may be said to rest only in preliminary state of initiation. Taking a more positive and purposive view of human life, the major concern of Nanak had been to seek a new orientation of relationship between man and God, man and society, and their inter-relatedness is the core of the religio-social discipline of Nanak's creed. In fact the Sikh faith finds no contradiction between the acknowledgement of the eternal and acceptance of the physical reality; if anything, it sees a deep relationship in this paradox. In Nanak's teachings, there is an organic relationship between theology, philosophy and mysticism.

The teachings of Nanak[1] from which the Sikh tradition has derived its inspiration contain certain fundamental key concepts and lessons of crucial significance. The overriding concern for human solidarity is predicated upon the Sikh concept of the Reality, the Truth, the universal God who is Eternal, all pervasive and is the source of entire existence. As a creed Sikhism is monotheistic in its fundamental belief. Guru Nanak's teaching about God is summed up in what is often described as the cardinal statement of Sikhism, the Mul Mantra. The *Adi Granth* opens thus—

Ek-oankar Sat-Nam Karta-Purakh Nirbhau Nirver Akal-Murat Ajuni se Bhang Gur-Prasad.[2]

Rendered into English it reads: The One Supreme Indivisible Supreme

[1]Apart from the Japji, Siddha Goshti, Dakhani Oankar, Rag Asa, the teachings of Nanak are interspersed in different hymns in various *Ragas* in the *Adi Granth*.

[2]*Adi Granth*, p. 1. The title Mul Mantra was applied to an abbreviated form of this invocation by Bhai Gurdas. Nanak himself declared that Harinam or name of God was Mul Mantra, *Adi Granth*, p. 1040.

Being, Truth Eternal, Creator *Purusha*, without fear, without rancour, timeless form, unincarnated, self-existent, realized through His own grace. This testament of God's oneness and universality and his qualities of infiniteness and fearlessness is basic to the Sikh thought and tradition. The first word that appears in the beginning of the various compositions of Guru Nanak is *Oankar* (prefixed by the numeral 'I'). It is an immediate reminder of the word *Om* in Hindu tradition which refers to the Brahma that transcends the threefold division of the time. The Guru did not abandon the ceremonial use of *Om*, he endowed it with a modified version effecting both its orthography and significance. However, *Ik Oankar* like *Om* stands for the one primal Reality. "My master is the one." "He is the one, there is no second."[1] There is no other—is a characteristic expression in Guru Nanak's compositions. The Guru identified the Truth with one.[2] If it is fractioned it would lose its integrity and lose its veracity. Guru Nanak emphasizes the greatness of God as the sole creator, the sole sustainer.[3] In His absolute nature, He is without any attribute and He alone is Eternal. "He is the gardener who looks after the trees and embellishes the garden."[4] For Guru Nanak the realization of the unity of God is not a conceptual abstraction. It was not derived from some speculative thought or deduced from some intellectual canon. It was a direct apprehension arising out of his personal experience. It was the reflection of his own subjectivity in self contemplation. Guru Nanak's concept of God is that of *Nirankar* nature which is different from the idea of *Nirguna*, though in general parlance they are treated as synonyms. Speaking precisely, *Nirankar* is formless and *Nirguna* is qualityless i.e., without any attributes. For Nanak the concept of formless nature of God was a subjective intuition. He says:

> *Atam chin bhaai Nirankari*
> (I had the vision of my own soul and I became a Nirankari.)[5]

Apart from this spontaneous revelation it required a great effort to conceive of something that does exist and is yet absolutely devoid of form. The formless God can however create forms. His Truth includes and transcends the conception of imminent reality of the world. "*Sachu karta sachu karnharu sachu sahibu sachu tek.*"[6] (Truth is the doer, the true master and Truth the support.) It is recorded in the oldest account of the life of Guru Nanak that in his vision of God he paid homage to

[1]Ibid., pp. 223, 397, 420, 433, 597 ff.
[2]Ibid., Rag Gauri, p. 223.
[3]Ibid., Rag Suhi, p. 765.
[4]Ibid., Sri Rag, p. 35.
[5]Ibid., p. 45.
[6]Ibid., p. 52.

the creator in words expressive of indivisible (*advaita*) absolute existence of God. In original, these words are *Adi sach,*[1] *Jugadi sach, Hai bhi sach, Nanak hosi bhi sach.*[2] (Eternal ever was, ever shall be, the Eternal alone exists, nothing shall last but the Eternal.) The characteristic of the one reality (*Ek Oankar*) as experienced and pronounced by Guru Nanak has the inevitable corollary that absolute is never incarnated, nor can any image contain them. The incarnations cannot be co-sharers of divinity which belongs to the Absolute alone. Nanak upheld the reality of God unencumbered by His incarnations in time and history and God alone must draw man's supreme worship. Notwithstanding the concept of absolute God in the Upanishad, the worship in Hinduism revolved around the *trimurti,* Shiva and Shakti and even medieval Bhakti cults of Vaishnava saints upheld the concept of personal deity substituting, however, Ram and Krishna for Vishnu and sought in them fulfilment of devotion and religious emotions.

Guru Nanak takes the metaphysical existence of mythology as subordinate to the absolute God, merely as entities through whom God exercises his threefold function of creation, sustenance and destruction. "Perfect illumination of the Transcendent Truth is beyond them."[3] Guru Nanak's attitude to quasi divine personages i.e., Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh appears to be one of acceptance as illustrative of great moral qualities but of course not as co-sharers of sanctity with God. The absolute devotion must go to *Oankar* for even Brahma enunciated the Veda the primal scripture through the enlightened demand of *Oankar* (absolute God).[4] As put by Mcleod "He refers to Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva in ways which suggest that he accepted their existence as real but they appear as creations of God deprived of all divine functions and subject to *Maya* and death."[5] Elsewhere they lose even qualified acceptance for example, "He is himself Brahma and Shiva. He himself performs all."[6] Nanak even refers to Sita as the ideal of sublime purity in womanhood and holds her in veneration in the Japji.[7] Thus Nanak severely criticizes the equation of God with the *avataras.* He says,

[1]*Sach*, from Sanskrit '*Satya*', means 'real' than which exists. Its applied meaning in Punjabi and Hindi is true, holy.

[2]This statement about the eternity and holiness of God is recorded in the *Adi Granth* at the beginning of Japji, p. 1. The substance of this is expressed in numerous places in the compositions of the Gurus who succeeded Nanak and in different expressions they emphasized the eternity of God in contrast to unreality.

[3]*Adi Granth*, p. 1036.

[4]Ibid., p. 929.

[5]McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, p. 144.

[6]*Adi Granth*, p. 908.

[7]Ibid., Japji, stanza 37.

"Burned be the tongue which says God came to earth as a human being."[1]

The Sikh concept of God is both *Nirguna* and *Saguna*—absolute unmanifest but also manifest. (*Nirguna bhe hoi Saguna bhe hoi.*)[2] "The term *Saguna* is usually used in connection with Vaishnava *bhakti* and in a customary sense it implies a belief in the divine *avataras* but in Guru Nanak's usage the term *Saguna* relates not to anything resembling anthropomorphism but to his concept of Divine Immanence."[3] In other words it is creative activity of God and its numerous manifestations that bear identity of *Saguna* attributes. To be clearer, God in his absolute form is beyond human comprehension but not wholly beyond human perception. However, for Guru Nanak, the explanation lies in His being endowed with attributes which bring Him within the compass of man's understanding. He, the *Nirguna*, out of His own volition becomes *Saguna* in order that man might know Him and knowing Him enter into a unitive relationship with Him.[4]

Since Guru Nanak believed in God as Eternal Truth, he invariably does not believe in the authority of the scriptures. Mere scripturalism without wisdom, is condemned in the Hindu scriptures themselves. Thus of what use is the *Rigveda* to one, who does not know the spirit from where the *Rigveda* comes and in whom all things abide.[5] Again, "Not through much learning is *atma* released from mark of birth, not through muttering of Vedas, it elevates through constant self-realization and search for the Truth."[6] Medieval *Nirguna* saints emphatically denounced the burden of scriptures "What quaileth thee to read the Vedas and the Puranas. It is like loading a donkey with sandalwood whose perfume he values not."[7] At another place Kabir remarks, "Why does thou utter the *Smritis* before dogs, why utter the mysteries of truth before the worshippers of '*maya*'? Utter thou the name of True Lord Rama and merge with Him."[8] Like Kabir, Guru Nanak too appealed to the intelligence and reason of man in place of exclusive reliance on the accepted scriptures. He desired man to utilize his intellectual potential not for the sake of argumentation but for the discovery of the most important truths of life for the realization of the highest of values. The limitation of the Vedas to comprehend God is underlined by Guru Nanak in the Japji.[9] At a certain level Guru Nanak even speaks of the

[1]Ibid., p. 1136.
[2]Ibid., p. 350.
[3]McLeod, op.cit., p. 167.
[4]*Adi Granth*, p. 750.
[5]*Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, part 4, stanza 9.
[6]*Katha Upanishad*, part 2, stanza 17
[7]*Adi Granth*, Kabir Sorathi, p. 665.
[8]Ibid., p. 475.
[9]Ibid., pp. 2-3.

scriptures as an obstacle to the pursuit of His Name.[1] Dr Grewal perhaps best explains Guru Nanak's attitude to the scriptures— "There is no direct denunciation, no categorical rejection, there is no irreverence but there is no acceptance either. This attitude may amount to a virtual rejection of traditional authority of Hindu scriptures."[2] The revolutionary mind of Nanak was averse to accepting blindly the scriptural notions but he laid great stress on acquisition of knowledge and wisdom. To quote him: "One can do good to others if he acquires knowledge and exercises his right judgement thereupon."[3] "With intelligence serve thy God and achieve honour with intelligence, argue with intelligence, acquire knowledge and assimilate it, with intelligence impart it to others. This is the right way of learning, else is evil,"[4] says Nanak. "Honoured is he who thinks right and learns and learns."[5] Thus Guru Nanak insisted on avoiding the burden of elaborate scriptural readings and emphasized on an ever-expanding wisdom as the goal of life. In Sikhism there is no dichotomy between revelation and reason and Guru Nanak clearly indicates that reason is an instrument of religious progress.[6]

If the reliance on the scriptures is to be avoided, then it is the word or *sabad* which is the central theme and key idea of the ethico-theological teaching of Nanak. The word in Sikhism carries the meaning of what God says. Guru Nanak emphasizes the efficacy of the *sabad* as the vehicle for the transmission of spirituality to the devotee; the truth reveals itself through the Guru. Man is released from the shackles of *maya* when he knows and experiences the Truth as the nature of the ultimate Reality. "In the three worlds, the lamp of the *sabad* is the illuminating light."[7] When Guru Nanak was asked by the Jogis in regard to his *guru*, he replied, "The word (*sabad*) is my *guru*—God had anointed him with His word, His wisdom (*logos*), and illumined his being so perfectly that the *guru's* inner personality was now the word personified."[8] "The word (*sabad*) is the image: person of the

[1]Ibid., p. 416.
[2]J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*, p. 204.
[3]*Adi Granth*, Rag Asa, p. 355.
[4]Ibid., Rag Sarang, p. 1245.
Akli Sahib seviai, akli paae maan;
Aklei parh kai bhujhai aklei keeja daan,
Nanak asli raahe iko, hor galan saitan.
[5]Ibid., Rag Prabhati, p. 1329. *Vidya veecharai parh pave maan.*
[6]Man is blessed with the light of reason and discrimination, *Adi Granth*, p. 913. Again, one in fear of God and discriminating between good and bad through reason, appears sweet to God. *Adi Granth*, p. 768.
[7]*Adi Granth*, p. 113.
[8]Ibid., Siddha Goshti, p. 944.

guru,"[1] says Bhai Gurdas. "In the word is the *guru* and the *guru* is in the word."[2] The repetition of word should not be mechanical but it should be inspired consciously with zeal and devotion. As Bhai Gurdas emphasizes, "when the mind dives deeper and deeper in the word, all mental impurities depart, the wisdom of *guru* dawns and man attains to equipoise."[3] The function of the word is that it provides the means whereby man can know God, the nature of God and means of attaining him. In fact as the expression of God's Truth, the word is instruction imparted to man; and by means of the 'word' the *guru* sought to eliminate ignorance and lead mankind to spiritual enlightenment.[4] "It is significant that Guru Nanak's concept of the *sabad* was imperceptibly transferred to his *banis* and to the *bani* of his successors whose compositions read more or less like variations on the theme chosen by him for edification of his disciples."[5] Moreover when the last Guru Gobind Singh decided not to nominate any successor *Guru* to himself, he referred his followers to the eternal *bani* in the Sikh scripture for guidance and inspiration.

The *sabad* is made manifest to man by *guru* and in the compositions of Nanak the word and the divine preceptor bear a basic identity. It is the *sabad* revealed through the *guru* that helps in following the path of contemplation and the attainment of salvation.[6] *Guru* is the dispeller of darkness and, as a guide, appears at the proper time to awaken the inner soul of the aspirant. God's revelations and His mysteries are made known to man through instruction of the *guru*. In the words of P.D. Barthwal, "The seed of spirituality which is already in the soil can only flower and give fruit when the *guru*, like a cloud, comes and rains a timely shower of blessings."[7] Guru Nanak, himself a *guru* of the highest order, speaks of the need for such a guide in life. He repeatedly emphasized that the *guru* helps in maintaining equipoise of mind which is essential for an equilibrium in society.

In fact the *guru* in Sikhism stands as a perfect messenger or prophet of God in whom the light of God shines fully and visibly. He is not God but is as perfect and sinless as God.[8] The mysteries of His creation stand revealed to the *guru*.[9] The seed of divine light is there in every

[1]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 39, Pauri 17.
[2]Bhai Gurdas, *Kabit*, 608.
[3]Ibid., 62.
[4]*Adi Granth*, p. 152.
[5]J.S. Grewal, and S.S. Bal, *Guru Gobind Singh*, p. 19.
[6]*Adi Granth*, p. 594.
[7]P.D. Barathwal, *The Nirguna School of Hindi Poetry*, p. 144.
[8]*Adi Granth*, Sri Rag, p. 61.
[9]Ibid., Rag Ramkali, p. 930.

heart. It remains hidden but God reveals it to man through magnetic touch of the *guru*.[1]

Guru Nanak does not refer to any human *guru* for himself. For him, the *Satguru* meant the inner voice, the mystical movement of God in the depths of one's being. "The *guru* is God, ineffable, unsearchable."[2] "The True *guru* is *Niranjan* (God). Do not believe that He is in the form of a man."[3] At another place Nanak declares, "*Niranjan* is the essence of all and His light shines in all places. All is God, nothing is separate from Him. He, who is infinite Supreme God, is the *guru* whom Nanak has met."[4] For Nanak, *guru* is trans-historical in nature, an abstract *guru* within one's soul, "the voice of God mystically uttered within."

By the time of the tenth Guru (Gobind Singh), the institution of Guru-ship as conceived by Guru Nanak and consolidated by his successors had become next to God, the most important, rather a unique base of Sikh structural thought. The *guru* had become a visible symbol of what is ultimate and unseen and functioned as a revealer and revelation of love itself. No wonder Bhai Nandlal, like Bhai Gurdas, spoke of the overwhelming greatness of *guru* as the perfect guide,[5] as the "real friend of mankind" and as "the Truth Personified."[6] In other words, Guru Nanak's intense humanism, his tenacity of purpose towards the Truth, his being in perfect tune with Lord, his instructions and revelation of His word without which none could achieve salvation, were the basic qualities which earned him the position, identical of '*Jagat Guru*'.[7] On account of his divine like attributes, the *guru*, though human in form, came to be regarded by the Sikhs as divine in spirit. Guru Nanak and the other nine Gurus in Sikh lineage are historical personages but the Sikhs regard them as bearers of a divine super physical existence.[8]

[1]Ibid., Rag Sorathi, p. 599.
[2]Ibid., Sri Rag, p. 21.
[3]Ibid., Rag Ramkali, p. 895.
[4]Ibid., Sorathi, p. 599.
[5]Bhai Nandlal, *Arjul Alfaz*, p. 213.
[6]Bhai Nandlal, *Ganjnama*, p. 113.
[7]*Adi Granth*, p. 1305.
[8]Guru Nanak, however, never claimed any divinity for himself and in all humility he calls himself as His servant, His bard, His devotee. See *Adi Granth*, Var Majh, p. 143. Since the Sikh Gurus to Sikh perception were more than historical entities, it was possible for the tenth in their line, Guru Gobind Singh, to proclaim that the spiritual energy of Gurus would be transferred after their life-time to two other entities, *Adi Granth* the Sikh scripture and the *Khalsa* i.e., the community of followers. In the figure of the *Adi Granth*, the Sikh tradition recognizes an aspect of divinity towards which the devotee can express his or her devotion.

Guru Nanak thus became the prime source of inspiration as also the chief determinative formulator of the Sikh religion and moulder of the life of the Sikh community. What Guru Nanak attempted to do was to build the response of faith in his disciples not merely by issuing commandments but actually showing them the path of salvation. He passed on the experience of spiritual unity and attendant blissfulness to willing seekers. This cannot be achieved through outlining an intellectual approach to the subject nor through sermonizing, it requires mastery by stages, on the part of the seeker, of the techniques of automatic contemplation.

The hymns of Guru Nanak are meant to serve the purpose of showing a proper path for spiritual direction, where the seeker perfects himself as a saint and a *bhakta*, who is constantly engaged in drawing out the best and helping his companions to work out their way to salvation. The spiritual pathway suggested by Guru Nanak did not involve any rigorous discipline of the body, nor any special rituals nor fixed form of worship. The goal and the path laid down by him are summed up in Guru Nanak's own words, "Not for me *gian* or *dhian* or *puja*. I have the indwelling Name of the Lord dwell within me. I do not recognise any religious garb or order, I hold fast to the Truth."[1] Guru Nanak's methodology of the practice of *Nam* (lit. name) is essentially a contemplative way to realization of spiritual essence of the universe. The way of '*Nam-Marga*' was duly evolved in Hinduism and was known as *Nam jap* or *Simran* i.e., repetition of a particular name of God. Recollection of God is not an exclusive feature of Hindu or Sikh faith. In the *Quran* it is said that "the gravest duty is the remembrance of God."[2] Among the Sufis, this duty was fulfilled by repetition of God's name '*zikr*' or of a religious formula like 'glory to Allah' or 'there is no God but Allah', accompanied by intense concentration of mind.

The practice and philosophy of *Nam-Simran*[3] is the core of Guru Nanak's religion. His numerous hymns have the effect of enjoining the path of *Nam* as the central theme of Sikh spiritual path. The vision and the basic technique of *Nam* was further developed by the succeeding

[1]*Adi Granth*, Rag Bhilawal, pp. 843-44.

[2]*Quran*, XXIX, 44.

[3]Various scholars have explained *Nam-Simran*. In the Punjabi language, see various works of Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan. Vir Singh, *Santhyas Guru Granth Sahib*, vol. III; Randhir Singh, *Gurmat Nam*; Jodh Singh, *Gurmat Nirne*. In the English language, see M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*; W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*; A.S. Sethi, "Sikh Meditation", *Proceedings of the Sikh Conference,* Toronto, Canada, 1979; A.S. Sethi, Jogindar Singh, "Nam Simran", *Journal of Comparative Sociology and Religion*, vols. VI, VII, 1980.

nine Gurus. Sikh conduct is rooted in metaphysical realization of union with God and *Nam-Simran* is a step towards that. An individual's life must conform to the proper object of contemplation. The True Name, in its deeper sense, is not the word by which we describe an object but the total power, quality and character of the Divine Reality. What was being urged upon by Nanak through *Nam* was not just to repeat the name Gobind or Hari but a total concentration on the nature of God and His attributes.[1] As Guru Nanak says, "Whatever God has made is an expression of His *Nam*. There is no place in creation where His name does not pervade."[2] And as Guru Arjan says, "Thy Name is support of all thy beings O Lord: Thy Name is the support of this world and all the universes."[3] *Nam*, according to Guru Nanak, is absolute reality. It exists and can be realized inwardly through total absorption of intellect in His remembrance. "Contemplation or recollection of Divine name is comforting, forgetting the *Nam* torments soul."[4] Again, "Through the Name one can swim across the ocean of Existence, through the name man obtains honour—The state of immortal bliss is found in the Name, for the Name is (the proper way of) adoration. The Name is the nectar that purges the poison (of *maya*). Through the Name descends all happiness upon the human heart, without the Name man is bound for the realm of death."[5]

Nam-Simran as a way of life encompasses spiritual and ethical conduct. A person who follows the practice of *Nam*, realizes the Supreme Identity within himself, who is beyond time and space. Based upon this faith, a Sikh sheds his *haumai* or ego, so that the spirit can reside within him. At the same time he does not deny the significance of empirical activity. The recognition of *Nam* as a pervading spiritual reality helps the Sikh to view his social relationships in a spiritual context. Through constant remembrance and practice of *Nam* a Sikh de-identifies from ego through Guru's grace and accepts selfless service for others.

There is no understanding of Guru Nanak's religion without realizing the significance of *bhakti* or devotion. Devotion, however, in case of Guru Nanak is not addressed to any intermediary deity i.e., Ram or Krishna but the Absolute Creator. The worship associated with Vishnu is specifically rejected and similarly Guru Nanak disapproves of the practices connected with the adoration of Krishna and Rama. For instance, he states, "The disciples play and dance, they shake their

[1]*Adi Granth*, Japji, p. 5.
[2]Ibid., Rag Ramkali, p. 897.
[3]Ibid., p. 284.
[4]Ibid., p. 897.
[5]Ibid., Rag Parbhati, p. 1327.

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feet, roll their hands, dust arises and falls over their heads, people are amused and they laugh and return home. The performers beat time perfectly, but only for bread and the dancers dash themselves to the ground. They sing as *gopis* and the Kanha, they sing as Sita and Ram."[1] Thus, it is evident that some of the most fundamental beliefs and cherished practices of the Vaishnava *bhaktas* were rejected by him. Nanak did not see any affinity between their form of devotion and his own. At the same time he did not accord any special treatment to the representatives of the Bhakti cult in his attitude towards contemporary forms of religious belief and practice.[2] In fact Sikhism and Vaishnavism make their own distinctive choices in one of the great options of religious life of *bhakti*. Guru Nanak chooses a universalistic path that relies upon an intuitive awareness of transcendent God who makes Himself reveal to the devoted heart and it is only there that one should seek Him. For Vaishnavas, He makes a manifestation of Himself in earthly incarnated forms and the devotee seeks fulfilment of his religious emotions in *bhakti* for personalized deities. However, it may be safely asserted that in both cases there is no salvation without devotion. There are numerous passages in the writings of Guru Nanak which clearly indicate that the primary connotation of *bhakti* for him, too, is loving devotion and he is very emphatic about this.[3] The ideas of love and dedication are inseparable in his conception of *bhakti*.[4] There is no salvation without *bhakti*, the loving devotion and dedication to God.[5] "Man should love God as the *chakavi* loves the moon or *chatrik* loves the rain."[6] "The lotus is whipped by the waves but it smiles, it dies without 'water', such should be the love of man for God."[7] Guru Nanak in fact regards *bhakti* as the true secret of contentment and peace which annuls all hunger or avarice. "Those w[illegible] worldly wealth are really poor, those cherishing thee (God) are r[illegible]ith all noble qualities."[8] At another place Nanak says, "Hunger for devotion to God consumes all sorrows."[9] In a vision of man's insatiable lust for power and worldly possession,

[1]Ibid., Rag Asa, p. 465.

[2]See Norvin Hein, "Guru Nanak's Comment on the Vaishnava Lila" in *Perspectives on Guru Nanak*, ed. Harbans Singh. The author reveals a refreshing awareness of distinctive entities of the religion of Nanak and those of Vaishnava saints.

[3]See for instance, *Adi Granth*, pp. 228, 413, 418, 420, 1172, 1342.

[4]*Adi Granth*, p. 1172.

[5]Ibid., Rag Asa, pp 413, 418, 420; Rag Gauri, p 228; Rag Basant, p. 1172.

[6]Ibid., Sri Rag, p. 60.

[7]Ibid., Rag Prabhati, p. 1331.

[8]Ibid., Rag Malar, p. 1287.

[9]Ibid., p. 419.

Nanak expresses the secret of true contentment thus: "Mere talk shall not remove the hunger of the avaricious," says Nanak. "The avaricious person shall be satisfied only by absorbing himself in the repository of supreme attributes."[1] Again, Nanak says,

Sach nam bin kisai na lathi bhukh.[2]
(Man's hunger never goes except through devotion to Him.)

The compositions of Guru Nanak and his successors have lent to the Sikh scripture the nature of an ocean of love and lyricism. The reader is fascinated by the import and subtlety underlying the devotional compositions in the *Adi Granth.* Guru Nanak elevated the medieval *bhakti marga* to the zenith of sublimity and made it a practical way of life for his disciples by giving it an authoritative tone. The devotion directed to Supreme Lord is the vital response required of all those who have perceived the presence of God suffused throughout His creation and in whom has been awakened a longing for union with Him. Guru Nanak's metaphysics of devotion is complete with assertions of a possible synthesis of '*I*' and 'Brahman' wherein the individual attains to the level of a *Brahmgyani* or a *Jivanmukta.*

It is evident from the teachings of Guru Nanak that religion is inward and its basic stress is on the discovery of the spiritual truth and transformation of the way of life, and the progressive subjugation of man to higher level of understanding and spiritual experience. The accent in Guru Nanak's teachings is strongly upon higher and higher level of understanding so that man goes progressively nearer to God and can align with Him.[3] From his own spiritual experience Guru Nanak formulated a concept of spiritual progress or ascent through five stages or *khands,*[4] and through a rigorous process of *sadhana* or disciplined devotion stage by stage, the individual attains the last of the five *khands* viz.; *Sach Khand,* the realm of truth, a stage of blending with the Absolute, a state which is beyond words, beyond articulation and can be only known in experience. It is beyond the three *gunas*[5]—

[1]Ibid., Var Magh, p. 147.
[2]Ibid., Rag Malar, p. 1287.
[3]Ibid., p. 7.
[4]Ibid. (Japji, Pauris 34, 35, 36), pp. 7-8. The first two *Khands*—Dharam Khand and Gian Khand—are related to the fulfilments of man's duties performed, determined by his social context. The third Saram Khand, points to transformed human consciousness and understanding of His will, and this involves shedding of ego. The fourth, Karam Khand, is the realm of grace that depicts the poise of devotee who is involved with action and service and has attained strength to achieve Him. The fifth stage, Sach Khand, is the spiritual consummation, the ultimate goal and purpose of human life to merge with the absolute.
[5]Ibid., Rag Dhanasari, p. 688.

Tamas, *Rajas* and *Sathava*, a state of eternal wonder and bliss,[1] of absolute peace and tranquillity.[2] The highest stage of spiritual transformation is depicted as the merging of individual spark with the light of God[3] like that of a drop of water with the ocean.[4] It is a state of existence in which the *Atma* of the individual is dissolved and absorbed in the *Paramatma*, the inner duality dies within.[5]

Guru Nanak's description of yearning of the soul for cosmos spirit has a powerful romantic and poetic appeal, particularly the composition Bara-Mah (songs of twelve months) in Rag Tukhari narrates the pangs of deep anguish and pain of the soul's separation from the Divine being. The essence of *bhakti* for Guru Nanak lies in the quest for the union with the formless ultimate Reality. But to allure the mind for deep concentration and love for *Nirguna* Lord, the imagery of romantic poetry is involved. The devotee is conceived of as the yearning female. The wife pining away in sorrow for her beloved husband gone to distant land, the bride (*suhagan*) seeks companionship of her friends (*sakhis/sahelis*) to while away the days of sorrow etc. The changing moods of nature and weather produce in the bride's heart new combinations of joy and sorrow and the tale of the beloved's condition is narrated monthwise in Bara-Mah. Her irresistible longing for her beloved's affectionate hugs is at its climax during the Sawan month of rain when pangs of separation are unbearable.[6] Though the symbolism in Bara-Mah is romantic the metaphor in essence aims at depicting the condition of the human soul in separation from the Divine Spirit, the formless Lord of Guru Nanak. A wonderful equilibrium is attained when the two are united and the mergence of the self in the infinite is conveyed through the metaphor of unitive experience of wife and husband.[7] The haunting sense of togetherness no longer troubles the soul in the stage of communion attained by the seeker. He becomes a *Jivanmukta*, the one who has realized salvation in life. The individual remains intact and alive biologically while the experience of merger takes place spiritually. The emphasis is to live in the world after the state of unity; realizing something of the "immensity of cosmic contemplations", the individual, however, retains his self identity in his relationship with collectivity.

It is relevant to note that according to Guru Nanak no amount of human effort can help one to achieve salvation or the state of *Jivanmukta*

[1]Ibid., Rag Tukhari Chhant, p. 1110; Suhi Rag, p. 729.
[2]Ibid., Rag Tilang, p. 725; Rag Gauri, p. 154.
[3]Ibid., Rag Tukhari Chhant, p. 1112.
[4]Ibid., Sri Rag, p. 22.
[5]Ibid., Rag Dhanasari, p. 661.
[6]Ibid., Bara-Mah, p. 1108.
[7]See *Adi Granth*, Sri Rag Asa, pp. 356, 359; Rag Malar, p. 12.

without His grace. The only way of attaining enlightenment is through the grace of God. The devotee can seek, pray but God alone is the bestower of union with Himself.[1] The concept of grace in Guru Nanak's thought repudiates all presumptions to salvation by mere human effort. In the *Adi Granth*, the grace is called *prasad, nadar, meher, bakhshish, kirpa, daya* and *love*. Grace is Nanak's concept of cosmic support to human aspirations. While worship is love of man for God, grace is love of God for man. In the *banis* of Nanak the significance of grace is stressed time and again. "Through grace, self is realized, through His grace He becomes a visible presence within one's heart and is revealed within the soul as a living light."[2] It is through grace that ignorance is obliterated and light of the Truth is perceived,[3] It is clearly emphasized repeatedly and emphatically in the *banis* of Guru Nānak that it is through the virtue of His Grace that there is imparted an illumination. He whom thou has enlightened understands, he whom Thou has given insight perceives all.[4] Again, he upon whom the Lord's gracious glance rests, Nanak he acquires the glory of the true Name.[5] In fact, in Guru's theology grace stands for cosmic interest in human affairs. It is the Divine response to the loving devotion of human beings and it is a distinguishing feature of Guru Nanak's views about cosmology that it presents a picture of loving and caring God. (Friends ask me what is the mark of the Lord He is all love. Rest He is ineffable.)[6]

There is a close connection between the concept of grace and that of *raza* i.e., submission to God. Corresponding to *raza* is the idea of *hukam*—recognition of the inscrutable mystery of the divine will. Both *raza* and *hukam* are Arabic terms and have the colouring of Muslim Sufistic thought. Right at the opening of the Japji, submission to the Divine ordinance is inculcated, with an entire stanza to the fundamental belief that all happens as Divine will ordains. Guru Nanak affirms the working of *hukam* and since it is the *hukam* that creates the infinite and eternal cosmos of which man himself is a part, a man of higher consciousness accepts all pervading cosmos order. He alone knows the way of life of truth, who under His *hukam* perceives in wonder the universal order.[7] To accept what is ordained by His *hukam* is to appropriate the means of union.[8] Recognition of *hukam* results in

[1]Ibid., Rag Ramkali, p. 878.
[2]Ibid., Sri Rag, p. 20.
[3]Ibid., Rag Maru, p. 1045.
[4]Ibid., p. 150.
[5]Ibid., p. 147.
[6]Ibid., p. 459.
[7]Ibid., p. 940.
[8]Ibid., Rag Tilang, p. 722

freedom from *haumai* (ego) and transmigration.[1] The man is called upon to recognize and submit to His order. Those who act according to *hukam* are put into the Divine Treasury while others are rejected as false coins.[2]

Another important concept of Nanak is *bhai* (fear) of God. Fear or *bhai* as commended by Guru Nanak is not merely the instinctive shrinkage back from danger, but it is the constant inborn apprehension of the soul lest one should do by word, deed or thought anything that may be evil. "Fear of God is of great weight and hard to bear, the wayward mind with all its effusions is slight, and yet who carried on his head (fear of God) can bear (its) weight. Without such fear no one crosses the ocean of existence."[3] Fear of God emancipates man from all other kinds of fears. The potent characteristic of fearlessness is recognized by Guru Nanak as one of the divine attributes.[4] He envisaged a man who constantly held fear of God but was free from undue awe of earthly potentates and burden of conventions. The negation of the latter fear was to deliver man from the bondage of traditionalism, irrelevant gods, their incarnations, and the esoteric rituals which had been reduced to mechanical devices. In a fearless rejection of the authority of the scriptures, divine incarnations and authoritarian rule of the priestly class, Guru Nanak repudiated the claims of the dead past on human mind and soul. Nanak's concept of creating fearlessness and standing against evils was a revolutionary concept. He aimed at restoring health and bringing about a rejuvenation of the body religio-social. "Fearlessness remains a personal and individual virtue so far as pursuit of truth is concerned but acting upon the truth is a deliberate act entailing consequences, both individual and social."[5] Nanak's aim was to inspire such practical fearlessness that would restore confidence and normalcy to man's faculties so that he could react against given situations. If need be, change them rather than go on accepting them as inexorable. No wonder with a reformer's zeal he launched a strong crusade against blind conventions of his age and desacralized the supremacy of the priestly class.

By the time Guru Nanak enunciated Bhakti movement in Punjab, a scepticism towards the underlying validity of rituals, superstition, conventional modes of worship and pilgrimages had already developed under the impact of Nirguna *bhakti* saints; even the Sufi saints had

[1]Ibid., Var Malar, p. 1289.
[2]Ibid., Rag Asa, p. 421.
[3]Ibid., p. 151.
[4]Ibid., Mul Mantra, p. 1, God is described as *Nirbhai* (without fear).
[5]Attar Singh, "Sikhism and its Medieval Milieu", *Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religion*, p. 10.

denounced particularism and ritualism. The crucial point is that while Guru Nanak goes along with the Sufis and Nirguna *bhaktas* to a certain length, he ultimately goes ahead of both of them when he makes a bid for changing what was dead and rotten. For him there could be no compromise and he challenged the fundamentals of entrenched ritualism and orthodoxy. The other denominations of the saints had broken away from orthodoxy only partially and hence continued to remain within the fold of the Brahminically-dominated Hinduism. Guru Nanak's approach was revolutionary for he challenged the very basis and foundations of what orthodoxy considered the essence of the faith. The Guru castigated the senseless followers of various faiths and urged them to clean their minds of excessive importance of ritualism and superstition practised in the name of religious piety. He warned the people against confusing true spirituality with performance of religious rites. "The real radical opposite of belief is not disbelief but superstition, for superstition gnaws at the very roots of faith and dries up the source from which religion springs. In superstition, therefore, knowledge and faith encounter a common enemy and to fight against it is their first and most urgent task." Guru Nanak recognized the enemy of his faith in superstition. He had no sympathy for traditional Hindu rites and observances associated with pilgrimage. About the ritual of sacred bathings at holy places, river banks (traditionally regarded as sixty-eight in number) the Guru in the Japji says, "I would bathe at the spots considered sacred if thereby I might hope to please Him."[1] The implication is that acts such as holy bath would not win God's approbation without cultivating true morality. According to Nanak, devotion to God was equal to bathing at the sixty-eight places and, hence, there was no use of pilgrimage when the heart was not cleansed of pride, its dust.[2] He stated: "The pilgrims set out to bathe at holy places. With treacherous bodies and corrupted souls they wash one part of pollution and add double the amount of dirt (pride). Their bodies are bright like glass from without, but within they hold poison pure. A good man is good even without wash. A thief is but a thief, howsoever, soaked."[3] Similarly, Nanak spoke of the futility of the code of penances laid down by the Hindu orthodoxy. For him "to give a feast, make a burnt offering, offer alms, perform penance and worship and endure bodily pain, are of no avail without the true devotion in this heart."[4] He lashed upon the Brahmins, Muslim *qazis* and Jogis alike for empty formalism, blind conventionalism and crude conservatism.

[1]*Adi Granth*, Japji, p. 3.
[2]Ibid., Sri Rag, p. 61. *Tirath nahai kiakarni man meh mal guman.*
[3]Ibid., Rag Suhi, p. 789.
[4]Ibid., Japji, Pauri 21, p. 5.

His open declarations against the practised formalities in religion made him oppose hypocrisy as well. Passage after passage in his Asa-di-var and his numerous hymns in the *Granth Sahib* are devoted to either denunciation or chastisement of the religious hyprocrites. According to Nanak "Blind of soul they (Brahmins) make a show of piety and wield the knife to butcher humanity."[1] "Their charity is received from extortion and social thieving."[2] The Brahmins had abandoned the intrinsic virtues which they originally stood for and had themselves fallen a prey to all the vices which they were expected to combat in the community and were left with only external mark of holiness. "What hypocrisy is this? Those who wear *janeu* (the sacred thread) around their neck, have thrown the thread of restraint neither over their passions nor over their desire for women. Daily are their faces fouled with shameful lust. Their eyes, their tongues know no restraint,—unrestrained, they wander through life and yet twist and put the thread on others—behold world: blind in soul are known as the wise."[3] The Brahmin had lost his integrity of character and his arrogance led him to high-handedness towards lower classes. Guru Nanak emphatically condemned Brahmins on this account too. According to him, their pride was based on caste-status and notions of purity and contamination arising out of caste distinctions.[4] The *Puratan Janam Sakhi*[5] refers to the extraordinarily scrupulous Brahmin who had refused even the uncooked food offered by Guru Nanak and preferred instead to dig his own cooking square. Wherever he dug, he found bones and after the whole day, he finally accepted the Guru's food. The evidence may have no historical basis but it accords with the spirit of Guru's teaching when he described impurity in the condition of Brahmin's mind. "Your evil mind is '*domini*' your cruelty a '*kasaini*', your malicious tongue a '*chuhari*', your anger a '*chandalini*', and all have led you astray. Why mark a cooking square when the four (outcastes) already keep your company?[6]

Guru Nanak judged the Brahmins and their practices on the basis of his own understanding of means of salvation. He stated that "a learned pandit is not necessarily wise and an illiterate person not

[1]Ibid., Rag Asa, p. 471.

[2]Ibid., p. 493.

[3]Detailed extract about the sacred thread is taken from *Adi Granth*, Rag Asa, p. 471.

[4]For Guru Nanak's vehemence against caste, refer to chapter 4.

[5]*Puratan Janam Sakhi*, 38, p. 72.

[6]*Adi Granth*, Sri Rag, p. 91. The terminologies like *domini*, *kasai*, *chandals* and *chuharas* refer to debased castes. See Ibbeston, *Punjab Tribes and Castes*, p. 334.

necessarily ignorant, he who knows Him by sincere submission is real man."[1] "The wise *pandit* is one who really knows the true object of worship."[2] The Brahmins knew nothing of the Truth and Nanak calls them "brokers in false practices, who run their shops on falsehood".[3] He also said, "You (Brahmin) are like a spider caught up and down in the web you have spun."[4] In the light of the degenerate behaviour of the orthodox religious elite Guru Nanak castigated their apparent piety as hypocrisy and advised the Brahmins to concentrate on true meditation on the Supreme Being.

Guru Nanak, concerned as he was with the redemption of the religious situation, was equally sensitive to the sense of religious awe, the priests demanded as agents of God. To revitalize a demoralised people, victims of a corrupt priestly class, it was necessary to lift the pervasive sense of religious awe that characterized the medieval Indian religious scene. Guru Nanak precisely did that by divesting the priest of his usurped glory. He insisted that the priests were in no way superior to a common man. If any thing they were less than men, for all their inhuman preoccupations. Having failed to discharge their ordained obligations they had debased themselves.

Guru Nanak, while rejecting Hindu ritualism and Brahminical pretentions as empty and hollow, also rejected Hathayoga and the practices connected with it. The protagonists of Hathayoga, popularly known as Jogis, had become a potent socio-religious force during the medieval period. Their influence in Punjab was particularly widespread. Guru Nanak condemned their practices in the strongest possible manner. The objections of Nanak arose from practices of the Jogis and the techniques they followed. He observed that all Jogis concentrated on a rigorous discipline of the mind and body to meditate on *Shunya* (void) for they believed that wisdom lies in the realization of vacuity of things and thus concentrated on the negative side of reality. Guru Nanak said, "All Jogis meditate on *Shunya*, they shout 'Alakh' which is the epithet of the creator, yet they know not the truth."[5] Guru Nanak prevailed upon the Jogis to concentrate on the truth, the Supreme Reality, instead of wasting their time and energies on futile belief in shadowy nothingness of *Shunya*,[6] (which means that what is produced by cause is not produced in itself and therefore does not exist in itself). Nanak said that "*Shunya* (void) is his (Jogi's) vanity which is

[1]Ibid., p. 359.
[2]Ibid., Rag Malar, p. 1256.
[3]Ibid., Rag Asa, p. 472.
[4]Ibid., p. 635.
[5]Ibid., p. 465.
[6]Ibid., p. 943.

to be cast aside."[1] Creator alone is the cause and effect of dissolution which goes on as a cyclic occurrence.[2] Guru Nanak insisted on concrete realization of the Truth against shadowy nothingness of *Shunya* and to tone up the moral sense, the laxity of which had brought about a general apathy towards one's obligations. In that context, Nanak reminded the Jogi to restrain and regulate his life and that "he had to die to self and then rise to life, this is how one should submerge in *Shunya.*"[3] "One who realises the essential nature of Truth, becomes aware of his role to others."[4]

With the exception of a very few sober Jogis, most of the Jogis aimed at acquiring occult powers and through these assert their influence over the society and achieve the fulfilment of their low desires. Guru Nanak considered passion for *sidhis* or miraculous powers dangerous as a rich man's lust for wealth. He asserted, that 'the craving for occult power is a pursuit other than spiritual.'[5] He condemned wonder working and miraculous powers. "That alone is true miraculous power that the Lord grants to anyone spontaneously. Lodging in heart the Divine Name by *guru's* guidance is true wonder working and miracles."[6] Three distinct affirmations emerge from the above lines: (i) pursuit of occult power is condemned; (ii) such powers may come by divine grace; and (iii) devotion to the Name is the true miracle making power. To be oblivious of God was worse than not possessing *sidhis.* To what extent the Jogis were won over by Guru Nanak cannot be determined but his constant condemnation of miracles probably made some impression on the popular conscience.

Guru Nanak also strongly reacted against yogic feats of rigorous fasting, self-mortification and artificial restraints put on the body for purification. He regarded all the physical techniques of Hathayogis as dangerously egoist and in no way helpful to a healthy spiritual life. He says in this context, "By Hathayoga and self-mortification does the body decay. By fasting and austerities is not the mind inclined to God, nothing equals devotion to the Name Divine."[7] In numerous hymns in the *Adi Granth*, the Jogi is exhorted to curb his mind running in all directions and to fix it on devotion and performance of moral duty. Guru Nanak reflected on the transmutation of the yogic practices into spiritual attributes. Thus he says: "Yoga lies not in the begging pouch or a staff, nor in wearing ear-ring, or smearing the body with ashes,

[1]Ibid., p. 940.
[2]Ibid., p. 1037.
[3]Ibid., p. 332.
[4]Ibid., p. 431.
[5]Ibid., Japji, Pauri 29, p. 7.
[6]Ibid., p. 14.
[7]Ibid., Rag Ramkali, p. 905.

shaving the head or blowing the horn. To live pure amidst the world's impurities is the true way to attain yoga."[1]

All varieties of yoga including those that are clean and involve spiritual pursuit are held for disapproval, each for a relevant reason—the cleaner variety because of its divorce from a moral, social responsibility and the darker varieties because of their encouraging release for man's lower passions in the pursuit of some kind of fulfilment which would in any case not be ethical.

Although the way of the Nathas is rejected and Guru Nanak warns people not to trust those who commend it, nor embrace it themselves, what is remarkable is that yoga provided Guru Nanak with a vocabulary already known to the people. The use of such technical yogic terms as *sahaja, dasam duar, amrit, anhad sabad* etc., would lead some to the impression that the Guru must have accepted some or the other of yogic practices. It may, however, be emphatically stated that though Guru Nanak used yogic terms and symbols to denote his spiritual experience, it was only a concession to current yogic terminology[2] and vocabulary which were so popular. For that matter, the terms drawn from other religious systems were also used as, for example, from Islam. Even without practising Hathayoga, Guru Nanak was certainly a Jogi, a perfect Jogi, who believed in disciplining of mind through concentration on meditation to God. In fact, the discipline and methods suggested for attaining spiritual soul in any system have obvious relevance and correlation to its social outlook. A fundamental ingredient of Nanak's religion is the social role of man because he is simultaneously responsible to God and to society. In a system where bliss or tranquillity of union of individual soul with the Absolute is an end in itself, the social aspect of man's role is blurred. For Nanak's faith, however, the practical aspects of spiritual training were not to be in a secluded monastery but in the family.[3] No wonder, Guru Nanak vehemently condemned the Jogis and the Siddhas who had cut themselves off from a life of household responsibilities and from the society. In the *Janam Sakhis*, the encounters between Nanak and Jogis are characterized by a clash and Guru Nanak is seen more hostile and

[1]Ibid., Rag Suhi, p. 730.

[2]While it would perhaps be unnecessary to examine all the terms, it may yet be stated about *amrit* that it is used by Nanak in the sense of nectar of immortality and not in the sense of *Maharasa* or semen virile of Jogis. Likewise *saumana* or *samauna* is, for Nanak, a blending of two principles, the individual self and universal self, and in no case it is to be understood in the yogic sense of union of two sexes, though the terminology is expression of unitive experience of husband and wife etc. *Anhad-sabad* indicates, in case of Nanak, experience of joy, blissfulness and not any particular sound, as expressed by the Jogis.

[3]*Adi Granth*, Rag Suhi, p. 762.

outspoken against the Jogis than any other group in the Punjab. Bhai Gurdas also refers to Nanak as a person who could overcome the Siddhas by power of the 'word' and the Jogis stood humiliated, subdued, and converted.[1] The *Puratan Janam Sakhi*,[2] the India Office Library Manuscript,[3] the *Gyan Ratnavali*,[4] the *Bala* version[5] and Meharban tradition, all record debates and disputes between the viewpoints of the Jogis and Guru Nanak over the question of social role of man, and the descriptions of these encounters invariably bring out the contradiction and hypocrisy of those who professed to renounce the world and yet were covetous of the things of the world.

On meeting the Siddha Jogis, Guru Nanak upbraided them for their attitude of total oblivion and removing themselves from the scene of human suffering where they must, as a matter of moral duty, bring the truth to mankind and work for the humanity. Thus Bhai Gurdas, in an emphatic argument, expresses the deep concern of Nanak for his people in his conversation with Gorakhnathi Jogis at Mount Meru. "The dark night of evil has covered the earth. The world is in the grip of wickedness—the enlightened ones (Siddhas) have hidden themselves in the mountain caves; who might save the world? The ignorant practitioners of yoga are little good except to smear their limbs with ashes. The whole world is sinking for lack of guidance."[6] While Guru Nanak castigated the Siddhas for their withdrawal from society, the Siddhas, on the other hand, blamed Nanak for a pollution of spiritual life in assuming a householder's life. At Achal Vatala on the occasion of Shivratri fair, Jogi Bhangarnath said to Nanak, "Why have you taken off the garb of renunciation and started living like a man of the world?" Guru Nanak, strongly defended himself and replied, "How strange that thou renounces the world yet again go to the householder to sustain thy living by begging alms?[7] When asked by a Jogi how it was possible to become detached in the turbulent world with a poised mind, Guru Nanak illustrated the conventional figure of lotus. The beauty of lotus is in no way diminished by the filthy water nor by the mud in which it takes its root.[8] Even before Nanak, almost all the Nirguna saints had vigorously commented on the behavioural patterns of the Jogis that negatived a healthy social living. Guru Nanak too was against the escapist approach of the Jogis and regarded it as a

[1]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 1, Pauri 29.
[2]*Puratan Janam Sakhi*, 50, p. 97.
[3]India Office Library, MS B 40, 117.
[4]*Gyan Ratnavali*, 170, p. 463.
[5]*Bala Janam Sakhi*, 61, p. 287.
[6]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 1, Pauri 29.
[7]Ibid., 1, Pauri 40.
[8]*Adi Granth*, Rag Ramkali, p. 877.

serious social lapse on the part of the Siddhas to have deliberately avoided facing social responsibilities. "The anti-social and anti-human influence of yoga had undermined the cultural and political foundations of India so much so that their extreme pessimism and unwordliness made the people politically weak and indifferent to their collective responsibility and they became prey to foreign invaders."[1]

To counteract the unworldly and anti-social influence of Jogis, Guru Nanak visited their strongholds to give their leaders a new direction of life and positive social outlook. He admired their courage, their zeal to know God, their anti-ritual attitude to Brahmins and the caste system, but he strongly criticized their pessimism, contempt for women and family life and their selfish individualism. It appeared to Guru Nanak that yoga as was being practised by the Jogis and the Siddhas had shed its usefulness. It provided an easy retreat from facing the difficulties of the world and to negate obligations. Yet Guru Nanak was not against yoga as such. He wanted to assimilate it and utilize it as a means for social uplift. The medieval yoga for this purpose had to be modified to suit the needs of man who lives in the world and is aware of social obligations. Its new version was found in Sahajyoga, which means contemplation and social service simultaneously. The *sahaj*[2] connotes anything attained in a natural spontaneous easy way, and not the agonizing, tortuous and extreme physical exercise of the Siddhas. Sahajyoga of Guru Nanak is the most practical form of yoga for a seeker of God with social commitment. Sahajyoga is a mental harmony that subsists spontaneously without effort. It keeps the poise and balance which is not disturbed by the routine duties of a house-holder. Sahajsamadhi is an experience on the socio-aesthetic plane. In the context of medieval degeneration of the Jogis, it was nothing short of a revolutionary break. "By laying down this discipline (Sahajyoga) Guru Nanak saved the Indian world of medieval society and religion from decay and disintegration and gave back to the world a much purer form of socio-religious quest."[3] Yoga for Sikhism remains a mystic faith but with foundations firmly embedded in theory and practice to society.

The Sahajyoga, as practised and preached by Guru Nanak, recognised the authenticity and validity of life. Guru Nanak, time and again, affirmed precisely and clearly the reality and significance of the world

[1]Trilochan Singh, "Sikhism and Yoga", *Perspectives on Guru Nanak*, ed. Harbans Singh, p. 302.

[2]The word *sahaj* is applied to the various Sikh doctrines to emphasize its importance. We have Sahaj Asana (*Adi Granth*, p. 237), Sahaj Samadhi (*Adi Granth*, pp. 1006, 1234), Sahaj Anand (*Adi Granth*, pp. 772, 773) Sahaj Shunya (*Adi Granth*, p. 97).

[3]Niharranjan Ray, op. cit., p. 97.

and of human life. He said, "This world is the chamber of God wherein the Truth resides"[1] and let the human body "be of service in this world so that we may find a seat in the court of Lord."[2] The Sikh teachings, therefore, revolve round the pursuit of an ethical ideal which under no situation was to be set aside or divorced from social life in general. True devotion to God, according to Nanak, was not possible without service to mankind.[3] "Without service, no reward may one obtain, without doing *seva*, the path of spiritual life may be said to remain barren."[4]

Thus in Nanak's perception a Sikh is not a self-centred individualist but his very being he owes to society. It is this attitude of Nanak's faith which determines and defines the role of human beings towards fellowmen. Sikh theology revolves round a humanist vision of religion where social role of man is simultaneously responsible to God and to society. This because Guru Nanak wanted his followers to be servants of God through service to fellowbeings.[5] Arising from the same ideal is the commendation of the householder's life.[6] In Hindu tradition, asceticism has never been exalted at the expense of the life of householder and the *Grihasthashram* was always given due recognition by the Hindus. In fact the householder's order of life is considered by Manu as the most important and responsible of all other orders, for the members of other three orders of life are supported by the householder and depend on him for their living and sustenance.[7] Manu condemned the pursuit of *moksha* without previously discharging one's duties to the family[8] and the performance of duties for the sake of duties is also considered by him as *nivritti* (renunication) and which has the same efficacy.[9] In this context, Lord Krishna also states in the *Gita* that "renunciation and yoga of action both lead to life of bliss but of the two, yoga of action is superior to renunciation of action."[10]

The socio-religious discipline advocated by Nanak was for the householder who though given to practical activity and involved in all matters of the world must view them as matters of the spirit as well. Guru Nanak wanted his followers to lead the normal life of a householder recognizing one's duties to family and society to which one belonged.

[1]*Adi Granth*, Rag Asa, p. 463.
[2]Ibid., Sri Rag, p. 26.
[3]Ibid., Gujri, p. 506.
[4]Ibid., Rag Asa, p. 468.
[5]Ibid., p. 992.
[6]Ibid., p. 354.
[7]*Manusmriti*, III, pp. 76-79.
[8]Ibid., p. 179.
[9]Ibid., XII, pp. 89-90.
[10]*Bhagavadgita*, Adhyaya 5, Shloka 2.

"To run away from the responsibilities of a householder is the highest of ingratitude. Of all the *dharmas*, the *dharma* of a householder is the highest. One attains salvation, the state of bliss, in one's own home."[1] While Nanak advised men to catch moments of peak experience of realization of spiritual vision, he did not condemn enjoyment of comforts of family life. But he preached moderation in these. A Sikh is a sharer of riches of family life, though he is never supposed to lose sight of the Reality. A life of action is commended as opposed to life of passivity and abdication of family responsibilities. The teachings of Nanak have a socialistic embrace in so far as the seeker becomes an active member of corporate life. The dynamic concept of social role of man as envisaged by Nanak held forth the concept of man's creative social efflorescence. From this standpoint Sikhism may be called the most materialistic of Indian religions in precisely the same way as William Temple once applied the epithet to Christianity, that is "a faith must take the material world seriously and potentially useful for mankind."[2]

Thus, as a social system, Nanak's religion is fixed firmly in realization of man's responsibility to family and towards fellow-beings. For Nanak, practical social virtues were an essential ingredient of piety. "Truth is higher than everything but higher than the truth is truthful living."[3] With an imagery drawn from farming, Guru Nanak states: "Make body thy field, the mind thy plough, make honest labour thy irrigating water. Sow the seed of Lord's Name. Let contentment be the leveller and humility the fence; with deeds of *seva* and love, the seed will fertilize."[4] Guru Nanak seemed to believe that virtues like compassion, contentment, modesty, piety, humility truthfulness, fearlessness and honest living were preached by each religion, but one who strove to be a true follower of his religion could eventually turn out to be a good man.

Even if God is the focal point of all discussion on values in Guru Nanak's hymns, the promotion of moral and spirituo-social values in human life is the dominant theme of the *Granth Sahib*. The importance of Self-cultivation and dignified morality led Pyne to remark, "In the doctrine of Nanak, morality holds a higher place than in those of many Hindu reformers. Loyalty, chastity, social justice, charity and temperance are among the virtues on which vital stress is laid."[5] The good religious minded person should never speak ill of others nor

[1]Bhai Gurdas, *Kabit*, p. 376.
[2]Sher Singh, *Philosophy of Sikhism*, p. 78.
[3]*Adi Granth*, Sri Rag, p. 62.
[4]Ibid., Rag Sorathi, p. 595.
[5]Pyne, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, p. 27.

indulge in slander.[1] "Sweetness and humility are the essence of virtue."[2] Patience, chastity and suffering are counted by Nanak among the means of a worthy life supported by discrimination (*vivek*) and fear of God. In Guru Nanak's own words:

> The ideal at the true mint is coined thus,
> Patience, the smith, works in chastity's forge,
> With the fire of suffering and the blow of God's fear.
> He melts the immortal nature in the melting pot of love.
> And on the anvil of commonsense, he hammers
> out with the hammer of Divine word.
> Only those work at their lives in this way
> who are visited by Grace, Nanak when God sends grace,
> with one glance of His, he fills man with ever-lasting joy.[3]

All that man is required to do is to make an honest effort to tread the path of self-control and self-knowledge with a firm faith in the principle of divine grace. The ideal set before man is to live a fruitful social life, also realizing something of the immensity of cosmic contemplations. The mark of this realization is freedom from ego. "He alone is emancipated who is rid of ego inside."[4] The final criterion of judging a man's stage of spiritual realization is his action or deeds which would be considered in the divine court and here lies the humanistic touch of Nanak's teachings. "By adopting the true conduct in accordance with the 'true *sabad*' and by singing the praises of Lord in accordance with the 'true *bani*' one finds the immortal state within oneself and receives honour in the court of True One."[5]

Thus the teachings of Guru Nanak acquired a distinct individuality as a new religious expression viz., Sikhism. Sikhism is definitely rooted in the Hindu faith, but once it took birth as a consequence of the prophetic revelation of Guru Nanak, it took an autonomous status as a new religion and did not exhaust itself as a sect within the original faith. This unique and singular graduation to a distinct faith was possible because Guru Nanak, the prophet of the Sikh faith, showed a remarkable capacity to resolve heterogeneous religious traditions prevalent in Punjab into a coherent and distinct system of spiritual thought and social action.

[1]*Adi Granth*, p. 766.
[2]Ibid., p. 470.
[3]Ibid., Japji, Pauri 38, p. 8.
[4]Ibid., p. 1010.
[5]Ibid., Rag Prabhati, p. 1342.
Sachai Sabad Sach Kamavai, Sachai pani hargun gavai.
Nij ghar vas amar pad pavai te dar Sachai sobha pavai.

Guru Nanak and Islam

Guru Nanak's religious vision, however, is not merely an aggregate of the existing traditions but a phenomenon which encompasses much more and is characterized by vigour and freshness. His teachings bear a good deal of similarity with Hinduism on the one hand and with Islam on the other and the terms and concepts used by Nanak in his compositions exhibit this clearly. In this context many scholars regard the Sikh religious tradition as a "Hindu-Muslim fusion, albeit spontaneous or calculated" and there has been no dearth of proponents of Sikhism's supposed syncretic or exclusively Hindu or even exclusively Muslim origin. Syncretism is used as a way of describing and categorizing certain religious phenomenon at decisive points of interreligious contact and influence. The perennial debate, as to what extent Nanak's faith arose as a syncretism of Hinduism and Islam hence warrants an objective probing, more so because Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, appeared as a religious leader in the Punjab, a region which had confronted and assimilated Muslim influence. Guru Nanak was not only aware of Islam being a potent socio-religious reality in Punjab but also of the impact of Muslim political domination. In certain respects his thought pattern, particularly his social ideology, displays strong affinity with Islam and many historians have ventured to declare that the influence of Islam on Guru Nanak was conspicuously high and he derived much of his belief from Islam. Niharranjan Ray, for instance, feels that there is a great deal of Islam and Muslim way of life in the Sikh society and that the Sikh teachings reflected the impact of Islam in many ways.[1] Toynbee writes that the Sikh religion is the creation of an ex-Hindu religious enquirer who adopted monotheism and rejected caste under the inspiration of Islam.[2] In the text books on the world religions in general Sikhism is usually labelled as a study in syncretism. J.B. Noss echoes his judgements in claiming Sikhism as a Hindu-Muslim fusion, albeit spontaneous rather than a calculated fusion, "the religion of the Sikhs is not to be confused with the rationalistic syncretisms whose adherents have been engaged in a reworking of philosophy rather than in a revival of religion, properly conceived."[3] John A. Hardon admits that Sikhism is "lightly dismissed as a hybrid of two old religions, Islam and Hinduism made into one" but labels Sikhism as a "conscious syncretism, one of the few that has ever been successful."[4] Ninian Smart describes Sikhism as "a faith designed to bring men of goodwill

[1]Niharranjan Ray, op. cit., p. 49.

[2]A. Toynbee, Foreword, *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, p. 10.

[3]John B. Noss, *Man's Religion,* p. 226.

[4]John A. Hardon, *Garden City,* vol. I, p. 224.

in Islam and Hinduism together."[1] Khushwant Singh[2] is prominent among the Indian writers who subscribe to the theory of syncretic origin of Sikhism and he maintains that Sikhism was born out of a wedlock between Hinduism and Islam. Supporting this view further, Professor Nurul Hasan writes, "Nanak made an explicit attempt to unify Hindus and Muslims and certainly succeeded in synthesizing within his own teachings the essential concepts of Hinduism and Islam."[3] This is the usual interpretation and since Sikhism stands historically and geographically in the midst of the confrontation between Islam and Hinduism in northern India, Guru Nanak appears to many as a conscious reconciler and synthesizer of two great but opposed religious traditions i.e., Islam and Hinduism. Notwithstanding attempts by many historians to regard Sikhism as a midway between Hinduism and Islam, any serious researcher and student of Sikh history, who has pursued an intensive and deep study of the compositions of Guru Nanak and successor Sikh Gurus (in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh scripture), would best understand the Sikh religious phenomenon as an autonomous and distinct revelation. The most elaborate exposition of Guru Nanak as the founder of a new faith has found in McLeod and Grewal's writings.[4] Originating from many Sant sects of medieval India, only Sikhism evolved a coherent theological system of its own, "with a close knit identifiable community with a heritage of symbols, customs, legendary and social character which is distinctively their own." The Sikh tradition has visualized Nanak's message and vision as a distinct faith in contradistinction both from Hinduism and Islam and not in continuity or an offshoot of either. Guru Nanak denounced the religious practices known to him, including Vaishnava *bhakti*, Nathism and Sufism, and looked upon his own compositions as divinely inspired. Guru Nanak in fact appears to have had a divine mandate, whatever was received and propagated by him was not simply an amalgamation of the existing systems but the outcome of his communion with God and the revelations received by him. His hymns make it clear that his thought pattern is distinct not only in theological concepts but also in its socio-political outlook. In the writings of Bhai Gurdas and the successor Sikh Gurus also there is an unmistakable insistence on the uniqueness and universality of Guru Nanak's message and Sikhism jealously defends its sovereign and unique character.

Thus, notwithstanding the long established historiographical tradition of attributing syncretic origins to the Sikh faith, it remains a distinct

[1]Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, p. 152.

[2]Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, vol. I, p. 17.

[3]Nurul Hasan, Presidential Address, Proceedings of the Punjab History Congress, Punjab 1966, p. 79.

[4]W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*; J.S. Grewal, op. cit.

phenomenon. It would, however, perhaps be utopian to hold that a faith, howsoever original, can remain unaffected by the existing faiths in the midst of which it takes its birth. A prophet proclaims the message of God according to needs of his time and place and in the process of transmission of the revealed truth every religious founder inevitably uses terminologies and concepts of the heritage into which he is born. The phenomenon of religious borrowing is in fact something not novel but has always existed in the history of religions and there is plentiful evidence of assimilation of the ideas and beliefs of one religion by another. To that extent, Sikhism too has not been immune from getting affected and having perceptible affinities with some basic postulates and terminologies of Islam. In our attempt to discern the nature of Islamic influence (if at all that is there) on the thought pattern of Guru Nanak, it would, be appropriate to take note of the similarities between Sikhism as enunciated by Guru Nanak and the nature of Islam as propagated by Prophet Mohammad. It has already been discussed that both Islam and Sikhism fall under the category of revealed religions because both Guru Nanak and Prophet Mohammad are believed to have been inspired by direct divine experience and both proclaimed and propagated the message of God according to their own understanding and needs of their times and place. Both Islam and Sikhism, in their respective contexts, had arisen under somewhat similar circumstances in Arabia and Punjab, surcharged with socio-religious decadence coupled with political sufferings.

Guru Nanak delivered his message in the background of empty formalism, devoid of any spiritual content. There is a famine of truth and in the darkness of Kaliyug, men have become ghosts.[1] He looked upon the contemporary world as disintegrated and delegitimized.[2] Himself shaken to the roots of psychology, Guru Nanak called upon men to fall back on their inner resources to build a future.[3] In an age of socio-religious decadence both Prophet Mohammad and Guru Nanak visualized a programme of change and social transformation and both were inspired by divine mandate, and in each case there was a strong sense of social commitment. The whole task was performed by the Prophet and Guru Nanak with the single motive of serving the Lord and fulfilling His will out of goodwill and love for humanity. Their struggle was actuated by a great sense of responsibility towards God and by trust in His guidance and help and they never claimed that they were anything more than mortals.

[1]*Adi Granth*, Var Majh, p. 145.

[2]Surjit Hans, "Historical Analysis of Sikh Literature, AD 1500-1850", Ph.D. thesis, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, p. 1.

[3]Ibid., p. 501.

In their respective situations both Nanak and Mohammad aimed at purifying the prevalent religious beliefs, those of Judaism and Christianity by Prophet Mohammad, and of Hinduism by Nanak. Both carried a new and distinct religious message. Both were forceful in their denunciation of polytheism and idol worship. "Cursed be the tongue which says God came to earth as a human being", said Nanak.[1] Mohammad repeatedly exhorted that those who worshipped idols would be thrust in the dismal abyss of hell.[2]

A conviction common to Islam and Sikhism is that man's good virtue might not be enough to achieve liberation and that liberation cannot be achieved without the grace of God. It is said in the Japji that the vesture of human body comes from one's own actions but the door of liberation is entered through God's grace.[3] Those who do not obtain it are cursed at God's portal, their boat is stuck in sands.[4] Nanak's emphasis on God's grace bears great similarity to Mohammad's for the latter said, "None of you may obtain salvation by his own efforts, not even we, except that Allah may shower His mercy."[5] In the *Quran* it is specified, "we guide those who have endeavoured in our path. Allah guides whomsoever He wishes and He knows best who are inclined to be guided."[6]

Both Nanak and Mohammad were more of preachers than theologians. It is their preachings which virtually shaped the theological parameters of the religions they propounded. Both tried to strike a balance between spiritualism and materialism requiring their followers to keep a due sense of proportion vis-a-vis matters, worldly and unworldly. The *Quran* says, "God has given thee life, neglect not thy portion of world."[7] Prophet Mohammad went to the extent of saying that he was required by God himself not to suffer extreme self torment in his zeal and devotion to the religion. The divine injunction was "we have not revealed unto thee the *Quran* that thou should be distressed but as a reminder unto him who fearth God."[8] Again, "O, children of Adam look to your adorement at every place. Eat and drink but be not prodigal. He loveth not the prodigal."[9] Nanak was also against self-torment and insisted that extreme rigours and asceticism should be avoided for in this very world one can get salvation.[10]

[1]*Adi Granth*, p. 1136.
[2]*Quran*, V, 93.
[3]*Adi Granth*, Japji, stanza 4th.
[4]Ibid., Var Majh, p. 153.
[5]*Quran*.
[6]*Quran*, XXVIII, 33.
[7]Ibid., XXIII, 23.
[8]Ibid., VII, 31.
[9]Ibid.
[10]*Adi Granth*, Sri Rag, p. 26.

Guru Nanak never preferred sword to sermon, nor advocated compulsion in place of persuasion. The *Quran* also says, "Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error, whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the truth."[1] Those who believe in violence and persecution as the very traits of Islam seem to ignore the very clear injunction of the *Quran*. "Kind word and protection are better than alms followed by injury."[2]

It is interesting to note the common characteristics of the modes of worship, prayer and pilgrimages laid down in Islam and Sikhism. Gurmeet Singh writes, "In both religions there is a striking similarity in the modes of saying congregational prayer. The ablution preceding prayer, the reverential attitude, the bowing down, the kneeling with the forehead placed on the ground and the reverent sitting posture, all are similar."[3] Though the Muslims say their *Namaz* facing towards the west (Kaba), still it is worthwhile to note that according to the Quranic injunction, there was no difference between the west or east so long as concentration on God was there. The *Quran* clearly says, "The east and west are God's whichever way you turn, you shall find the face of Allah. God is omnipresent and omniscient."[4] Guru Nanak also fixed no rigid qualifications of face direction while in prayer. Islam did not favour mere formality of a *haj* unless the dirt of sin was removed and the traits of purity and consideration for fellow beings were cultivated. Nanak too emphasised repeatedly the futility of pilgrimage in his various hymns and declamations with Muslim *qazis*, Brahmins and the Jogis. Both Mohammad and Nanak had spoken against the observance of ritualism and formalism in faith and worship.

It is the social ideology of Prophet Mohammad and Guru Nanak that displays a strong affinity. It is clear from Mohammad's fervent denunciation of social injustice that the task of the Prophet was to preach a social revolution with a religious thrust. Prophet Mohammad's reform and revolutionary social gospel transformed the Arab society into a creative ethical force with a socio-political outlook. It was a remarkable achievement of the Prophet Mohammad that for the first time in the history of Arabia, an attempt was made to evolve a social organization with a religious ideology of fraternity and egalitarianism. Mohammad succeeded in abolishing all distinctions of birth and the degree of an individual's merit and usefulness to society was set forth as the only standard of his worth. For Prophet Mohammad, human

[1]*Quran,* II, 264-68.
[2]Ibid.
[3]Gurmeet Singh, *Islam and Sikhism*, p. 43.
[4]*Quran*, II, 136.

equality and fraternity were not abstract norms, but real objective values for the creation of a new social pattern and they pertained not merely to the consciousness of man but also his actual social behaviour. The initial impulse of Mohammad's message was democratic, and intensely egalitarian, though, in course of history, it underwent a radical change. The lust for power and the inability of the pious and the truly religious to impose restraints on social evils nibbled at the high standards of the Prophet's dynamic social ideals. Guru Nanak stands close to Mohammad in regard to the social ideal of creating a chosen community with given ethical and social commandments, and of inculcating in that community a strong sense of brotherhood and comradeship based on the bonds of following a common religion. Nanak, too, had insisted that there is no specially privileged class nor a privileged priesthood. Socially there is no difference between the greatest and the commonest among the faithful. Nanak's anti-caste programme was backed by positive action and through *langar* and *sangat* he tried to inculcate feelings of community living and social solidarity. Both Islam and Sikhism emphasised very strongly the concept of brotherhood; the *ummah* the community of believers, was believed to be the very image of the Prophet in the same way as the Sikh "*Sangat* was to be *sachkhand* i.e. abode of God."[1] Guru Nanak's successors strengthened social cohesion and inducted more specific socio-political symbolism to the orbit of his faith and the community.

The feeling of intense social solidarity was evident among the followers of the two communities on the principles enunciated in the two faiths and their physical symbols viz., Prophet Mohammad and the *Quran* in the case of Islam, and Guru Nanak and the *Adi Granth* in respect of Sikhism, who played their own role in promoting the assertion of their independent social identity. As a result, Hinduism which had earlier been able to assimilate religious currents emerging from time to time, found it difficult to do so in case of Islam which stood separate like a rock. Similarly, an outright rejection by the founder of Sikhism of the orthodoxy and his stress on the equality of man attracted for the new faith a following which grew both in numbers and intensity of their convictions at a pace which Hinduism failed to arrest. A stage was consequently reached where the new faith acquired the identity of a separate community outside the Hindu caste order.

It has been argued by Toynbee and others that Guru Nanak called for the abolition of the caste system under the influence of Islam. There is no evidence for such an assertion. During the three centuries or more during which Muslims had ruled Punjab before Guru Nanak, the Islamic concept of universal brotherhood and rigid insistence on

[1]Bhai Gurdas, *Kabit,* 63.

egalitarianism had ceased to be a striking novelty. A study of social life in the Punjab of fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with predominant militant Muslim polity, often discriminating between Muslims and non-Muslim, would show that the Islamic[1] concept of the unity of human race had become a theological dogma for a professedly egalitarian community of Muslims and not a living social reality. Moreover, there were sectarian differences between Shias and Sunnis as also other Muslim sects, each observing its own customs, beliefs, rituals and sacraments.[2] Some sort of social exclusiveness parallel to that of Hindus also existed among the Muslims and the so called socio-economic equality was more or less effective only within a limited range and not within the Muslim society as a whole. The advent of Islam did not lead either to the displacement of the caste or, for that matter, establishment of a social order based on the principles of universal brotherhood, as envisaged by Prophet Mohammad. The Indian society already fragmented due to the caste system was further divided in the wake of the Muslim rule into two major religious entities i.e., Hindus and Muslims.[3]

It thus seems that, in the context of the social milieu of Guru Nanak, there is no evidence at all to show that Guru Nanak's anti-caste ideology was inspired by Islamic influence though he would no doubt have taken note of and appreciated this Islamic principle. Guru Nanak's concept of universality of the human spirit and the consequent equality of all human beings was the result of his concept of unity of the cosmos. The basic metaphysical doctrine of Sikhism is the unity of God and the unity of humanity. Guru Nanak's firm belief in the absoluteness of the ultimate reality is universal in nature and spirit. The logic of love for God leads towards affirmation and acceptance of social responsibility whereas the way to God is through virtuous deeds and the goal is to establish brotherhood of human beings. Guru Nanak criticized the tyranny, barbarity and the degrading inhumanity of the caste ideology and the underlying idea of pollution not under the influence of Islam but because of his strong feeling of universal humanitarianism,[4] and the idea that all mankind was God's creation

[1]The *Quran* implicitly and unequivocally establishes the unity of mankind and that all people and nations are one and same in the eyes of God who takes equal care of all and is merciful to all. For instance, *Quran,* IV: 111, 213, X, 19.

[2]Muhammad Akbar, *The Punjab under the Mughals.*

[3]*Adi Granth*, p. 725.

[4]Several hymns of Nanak in the *Adi Granth* demonstrate his vehement crusade against the caste and Guru Nanak's sympathy with the lower status groups is well attested. See *Adi Granth*, pp. 7, 9, 10, 15, 23-24, 142, 351, 488, 504, 729, 751, 999, 1126. For a detailed discussion on Guru Nanak's reaction against the caste ideology, see ch. 4.

occurs several times in his compositions. The Sikh faith as preached by Guru Nanak is definitely at variance with the social facets of the Hindu caste structure. Nirguna monotheists and Sufi saints had also repudiated the validity of caste but Guru Nanak's outlook, as on many other issues, was highly intrinsic as also practical for he succeeded in setting up a social order outside the Hindu Varnashrama Dharma.

Much is made of Islamic influence in explaining Guru Nanak's emphasis on monotheism. Belief in one God to whom none is to be likened is a phenomenon common to practically all major faiths. As far as Muslim faith is concerned belief in the unity of God is the pivotal point round which all doctrines and teachings of Islam revolve. Religion for a Muslim begins with the declaration of the *Kalima, La ilah illa Allah Muhammadur Rasul Allah* (There is no God except Allah and Mohammad is Allah's messenger.) Unity of God and the prophethood of Mohammad are, therefore two fundamental elements of faith. The most profound exposition of the divine monotheism in the *Quran* is that which every Muslim is supposed to repeat in his prayer. It is stated in the *Quran*, that "say He (Allah) is one, Allah is He, on whom all depend, He begets not nor is he begotten. None is like Him."[1] Thus it is an article of firm faith for a Muslim to affirm his belief in Allah, for he alone is the object of worship. He rules over the universe, no being, human or otherwise, can at any point of its career become God.

The concept of *Om* or one God had developed in the Indian consciousness and of this the thoughtful spiritually minded had an awareness since long before the advent of Islam. The affirmation of one reality, the ultimate ground of all that exists, is the central core of Guru Nanak's teachings also and the Sikh faith is strictly monotheistic. Since the birth and growth of the Sikh faith and community took place in a historical milieu that bore the impact of Islamic socio-religious culture, it is often held that Guru Nanak could have derived his firm belief in monotheism only from Islam. No doubt, Islam through Sufism provided a strong encouragement in strengthening monotheistic tendencies and beliefs in the omnipresence of God, but the monotheism of Guru Nanak, as revealed through his numerous verses in the *Guru Granth*, bears essentially and emphatically the character of his independent and original intuitive revelation. The very first parable of Sikh faith, Mul Mantra, which is the outcome of Guru Nanak's intuitive experience, provides the root statement of the Sikh monotheism. It[2] begins with *Ek Onkar*, the only one, and to emphasize the oneness of God Nanak adds that there is no other. The whole content of *Guru Granth Sahib* stresses the monotheistic faith and the *banis* of Guru Nanak and successor

[1]*Quran*, CXII, 1-4.
[2]*Adi Granth*, Mul Mantra, p. 1.

Gurus time and again affirm that God is one and only one without a second. In sublime Punjabi poetry Guru Nanak has sung praises of God, who is eternal, infinite and all pervasive. He is not limited by time. He is perennially self-existent and is the source of creation. Guru Nanak's God is both immanent and transcendent. He says "unknown is my Lord, infinite, unfathomable, imperceptible, who dieth not nor is He bound to the writ of Karma. He is incarnate not, he is self-existent. He is neither lured away by doubts nor by attachment, I am a sacrifice to my Lord who is revealed through the true word.[1] If one were to study and analyse numerous *banis* of Guru Nanak as also the Mul Mantra and the Japji (the Sikh morning prayer) which cover comprehensively Nanak's monotheistic conception and nature of God, we find that Nanak's montheism is expressed in terms of the concepts of supreme being as *Akal Purukh, Ek Onkar, Kartar, Nirankar, Satnam* etc. with connotation all their own. Guru Nanak's monotheism can be explained in terms of *bhakti* expression using Hindu terminology and imagery, it can hardly be shown that Islam provided a source for Nanak's monotheism. Sikh tradition bears witness to the individual quality of Guru Nanak's conception of the Supreme Reality. Rejecting the theory that Guru Nanak's monotheism was the result of Muslim influence, Professor M. Mujeeb has aptly put it, "The revelation that came to Guru Nanak must have been as direct and immediate and as independent of history and social circumstances as the religious records of the Sikhs show it to be."[2] The inference that we derive from all that Guru Nanak said about God is that his revelation and expression of monotheism is indigenous and not an ingredient assimilated from Islam or speculative thought; it was the reflection of his own subjectivity in self-contemplation.

A very important phenomenon in the context of Muslim influence on Guru Nanak is the use of Perso-Arabic terms by him in his compositions. Nanak had to borrow his words and terminology from Islam and Hinduism just as was done by Mohammad from Christians, Zoroastrians etc. From the time of Guru Nanak, considerable body of Islamic words were incorporated into Sikhism. Significant contributions to this particular theme have been made by Mohan Singh[3] and C. Shackle.[4] Something over 1,000 Persian loan words occur in the *Adi*

[1]Ibid., p. 597.

[2]M. Mujeeb. "Guru Nanak's Religion, Islam and Sikhism" in *Guru Nanak, His Life, Times and Teachings*, ed. Gurmukh Nihal Singh, p.116.

[3]Mohan Singh, "Arabic Persian Key Words in Sikhism", in *Sikhism and Indian Society*, Simla, 1967, pp. 247-59.

[4]C. Shackle, "Approaches to the Persian Loans in the Adi Granth", *Bulletin of SOAS*, London, vol. XLI, 1978.

Granth and considerable large numbers are given in what seems to be an attempt at a comprehensive cataloguing.[1]

Guru Nanak's readiness and ability to address Islam through its own concepts and terminology is perhaps the most remarkable feature of his relationship to Islam. He addressed Muslims in their own terms and not as a Hindu standing outside it. Often verses hostile to certain aspects of Islam are contained in passages attacking similar faults in Hinduism or yoga. Nanak criticized both the religions for their inability to answer the question of when the universe was brought into being. In this context he says,

> *"vela na paia pandati ji hovai lekhu purana*
> *vakhatu na paia kadia ji likhani lekhu kuranu"*[2]
> (The *pandits* have not found the time or it would be written about in the Puranas. The *qazis* have not either or they would have written about in the *Quran*.)

Similarly, he refers to the falsity of religious leaders of both the communities and the images serve to drive home Guru Nanak's central insight into the nature of religions which is most famously expressed in the formula 'there is no Hindu and there is no Muslim.'[3] It is important to note that similar equation of falsity of Hindus and Muslims is found in Kabir also. He said, "Hindus have died worshipping their idols, Muslims prostrating their heads".[4] It is Nanak's ability to distinguish between the essential truth and unimportant feature that he charged the *mullahs* and *qazis* for deviating from the right path and Guru Nanak was bold enough to point out the errors in behavioural pattern of *mullahs* and *qazis*. One classic example of this was his reminder to *mullahs* in Mecca that God resided in all directions. It was a defiance not out of irreverence but was aimed at drawing the attention of the ignorant to the meaningful Quranic injunction that "wherever you turn is the face of Allah."[5] Similarly, within India, he pointed out to Muslim *qazis* and dispensers of justice that their activities were in contradiction to and in compete disregard of the true ethics of Islam. Nanak's

[1]Allah Giani, *Guru Granth aur Urdu*, Lahore, 1966. This catalogue which provides a useful starting point has been checked in detail against the indispensable *Adi Granth* concordance by Gurcharan Singh. See *Adi Granth Sabad Anukramanika*, 2 vols.

[2]*Adi Granth*, Japji, Pauri 21. For juxtaposition of the false *qazis*, Brahmins and jogis, see *Adi Granth*, p. 1245 and Rag Dhanasari, p. 662.

[3]Guru Nanak did not appreciate any of the established religion of his time, whether Islam or Hindu.

[4]*Adi Granth*, Sorathi, Kabir, p. 654.

[5]*Quran*, XI, 209.

comments are usually directed at particular aspects of Islam, more often of practice than belief and, for that matter, his attitude is the same towards Hinduism. Notwithstanding his frankness, his relations with Muslims were cordial and his creed was tolerated by the latter as an ethical code coming nearer to Islamic concepts of *wahdat-ul-wujud* (unity of Godhead) and universal brotherhood. Guru Nanak in fact displayed a comprehensive understanding and awareness of Muslim belief and practices and talks of Allah, the Prophet and the *Quran* and the *shariat*. He regards the Prophet as next to God: "The first name is that of God. How many prophets are at His gate."[1] This is not a denial of the Prophet but confirmation of the Islamic doctrine that prophets have been sent to all people of the world. Nanak also bracketed the Prophet with thousands of Brahmas, Vishnus and Shivas.[2] For Nanak, there are millions of prophets but only one God.[3] In the eyes of his contemporary Muslim followers, Mohammad was the seal of the prophets[4] and this imparted to their faith an element of exclusiveness.

If Guru Nanak admonished, in a straightforward manner, particular practices of Muslims, he also emphasized what he thought was true in Islam. Like "Make mercy your mosque, sincerity to prayer your carpet, righteous living thy *Quran*, modesty your circumcision, good nature your fast, and then become a Muslim.[5] There is also reference to Islamic names of God "Ailah is the unreckonable, the unreachable, the mighty, the creator, the gracious; all the world is subject to transmigration, only the Merciful is fixed."[6] There is also vivid metaphorical employment of Muslim words of kingship, machinery of government etc. which reflect the contemporary status of Islam as the politically dominant religion.[7]

The fact is that Guru Nanak did employ, in his own teachings, terms and concepts made current by centuries of contact with Islam in Punjab and this reflects the nature of social contact between the two communities. The important thing is that terminologies and expressions used by Guru Nanak were taken from the current coinage of mystic language which came from the circles of both Sufis and *bhaktas* all of whom were working within an essentially common tradition of medieval North Indian popular religious poetry. A prominent characteristic with

[1]M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, vol. I, p. 123.

[2]Ibid., p. 40.

[3]J.S. Grewal, op. cit., p. 228.

[4]Muslims call Mohammad as *Rasul-ul-Akhirin* (i.e. the last prophet) and believe that no prophet shall appear on earth after him.

[5]*Adi Granth,* Var Majh, pp. 140-1.

[6]Ibid., Sri Rag, p. 64, *"Alahu alakhu, agammu, kadaru, karanaharu, karmum Sabha dunia avana javan, mukamu eku Rahimiu".*

[7]Ibid., Rag Asa, pp. 468-71.

them was the employment of simple images to assist the transmission of religious teachings. Saints like Kabir and Nanak apparently drew on the current terminologies of the mystic way of life and liberally used both Hindu and Muslim names of God. Guru Nanak in fact "may have picked up words and phrases here and there from those with whom he spoke, he may have woven them into pattern of his own revelation but the teaching that he gave to the world was one from his own soul for undisturbed communion with nature, and the creator."[1] In fact one must safeguard against an identification of words and terminologies used with the basic conceptions and postulates. The question of borrowing becomes an academic one and more often a migration of words in socio-religious contact does not necessarily mean a substantial migration of basic concepts. In this context, it is aptly stated by the British Indologist, Shackle, that "the use of Islamic terms does not guarantee Islamic content, nor the awareness of Islam and uses of Islamic loan words in the *Adi Granth* be confused with any direct influence from Islam."[2] The inclusion of the mystic writings of an eminent Sufi-saint like Farid, in the *Adi Granth*, has been interpreted as an attempt to syncretize Sufi thought with that of Sikh teachings. But the impression is not very convincing because there is no expression of any doctrinal or spiritual ideals in terms exclusively Muslim or Sufi. Farid's writings were commended by Nanak and later incorporated in the *Granth Sahib* by Guru Arjun[3] because Shaikh Farid had become a very significant saint with a deep stamp of socio-religious culture of Punjab and with a message of universal toleration similar to that of the Sikh Gurus. The hymns and couplets attributed to Farid are of obvious relevance as the utterances of a Muslim, just as their selection and inclusion in the *Adi Granth* is significant evidence for the kind of Islam considered worthy of record by its compiler. Equally to be considered are the much more numerous compositions attributed to Kabir. Adaptations of themes found in these poets are also to be met within the hymns of Guru Nanak although it is his fresh inspiration which forms the vital nucleus of the *Adi Granth*. The very fact that the Sikhs developed their own scriptural tradition definitely shows that Guru Arjun was trying to fix the Sikh identity away from Hindu and Muslim religious traditions. According to Paul B. Courtright, "The fact of fundamental importance is that the Sikh scriptural tradition (alongwith institution of Guru-ship) secured religious authority and

[1]D. Greenless, *The Gospel of Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 24.
[2]C. Shackle, op. cit., p. 94.
[3]Shlokas attributed to Shaikh Farid had long been current in the Punjab and a section had been included by Guru Arjan in the *Adi Granth*, pp. 1377-84.

relevance for the Sikhs outside Hindu and Muslim sources of authority."[1]

While summarising our discussion as to what extent Islam fed into the thought pattern of Guru Nanak's ideology, it may be stated that the founder of the Sikh faith was not dependent on the concepts of Islam or much less used them as edifice for the new faith. Some resemblance in the matter of basic ethical postulates can be discerned as an inevitable factor in almost all religions and yet their separate identities are hardly ever questioned. The same holds true in regard to Sikhism vis-a-vis Islam. Notwithstanding the use of Muslim terminologies and some affinities with the postulates of non-indigenous traditions of Islam and universal teachings of the Sufis, "no fundamental component of Nanak's thought can be traced with assurance to Islamic influence." Any similarity that one notices in Islam and teachings of Nanak is not always a case of borrowing but often of independent confirmation. Mcleod states, "Guru Nanak's principal inheritance from the religious background of the period was unquestionably that of the Sant tradition and evidence of other independent influence is relatively slight. We must acknowledge that the antecedents of the Sant beliefs are by no means wholly clear and that within our area of obscurity there may be important features which were derived primarily from Sufi sources.[2] In fact, Guru Nanak's kinship and affinity with the Sant or Sufi tradition does not mitigate his position as the founder of a new system of religious beliefs and practices. Almost all evident affinities with Islam found in the teachings of Guru Nanak should not be taken as a case of historical dependency of the latter over the former nor does it undermine the original nature of Nanak's revelation. It would be appropriate to state that while Guru Nanak took note of the Muslim socio-religious phenomenon and there are evident affinities between Islam and Sikhism, the founder of Sikh faith, however, is seen more influenced by Indian spiritual tradition and his thought pattern is deep rooted in the Hindu religious ethos. This was largely due to the fact of his being born and brought up in Hindu tradition. While his criticisms of socio-religious behavioural pattern of Muslims are peripheral, he, however, examined the Hindus from within and became an ardent rejuvenator of Hinduism. Moreover, his activity is inspired by a strong sense of social commitment to orientate the Hindu faith in new directions. Since his moorings being essentially of Hindu origin, the spiritual content of Guru Nanak's ideology is quite naturally and to a considerable extent, from that of Hinduism. This, however, does not detract from the fact that he brought into existence a religious system which in its final projection and

[1]Paul B. Courtright, "Syncretism and the Formation of the Sikh Tradition", *Journal of Religious Studies*, 1978, p. 11.

[2]W.H. McLeod, *The Influence of Islam on the Thought of Guru Nanak*, p. 13.

substance was distinctively original and independent.

The view that Guru Nanak initiated a syncretic movement based on ideas borrowed from Islam and Hinduism and aimed at reconciling two warring creeds must also be rejected because such a view does not project a sound historical judgement and appears to arise from lack of adequate study and understanding of the scriptural tradition of the Sikhs. The Sikh Gurus repeatedly confirm the separate and distinct identity of their faith. The misunderstanding about syncretic nature of a religious phenomenon is likely to occur in any discussion that relates to antecedents and influences because a reformer or founder of a faith works within a given environment whose impact cannot be denied. Since the origin and evolution of Sikhism took place at a decisive point of interreligious contact between Hinduism and Islam, Sikhism has not been immune from being affected by the contemporary religious phenomena and its theological vocabulary manifests a synthesis of three important strands—Bhakti, Natha and Sufi. This is however, not to suggest that Guru Nanak showed no originality and was attempting a syncretic amalgam between diverse faiths because "others may supply threads but the pattern which he weaves with them is a design of singular originality; one may trace the colour of threads to a variety of sources the ultimate pattern remains uniquely his own."[1] In its substance and direction, Sikh faith is not derivative or syncretic but original and independent, based on the intuitional feelings of the founder and the revelations received by him, and Sikhism jealously defends its distinct self-identity and character.

Though Guru Nanak did not seek to bring about a syncretistic union between different religious denominations and traditions, he, however, aimed at bringing together the different and in some ways contradictory culture forms in a common fold of spiritual and social brotherhood and his teachings were meant as much for Muslims as for Hindus. From the very start the Sikh Gurus envisaged Sikhism in distinction from and not opposition to other faiths and Sikhism was conceived as a faith aimed at resolving contradictions born of divisions and schisms in the human society. A distinctive feature was search for the universal reality of God beyond particularism, and he wanted mankind to form a single human community with a true spirit of fraternity and fellowship. For one who practises Truth there is only one religion.[2] The Sikh Gurus demolished the concept of finality of any particular religious vision and the claims of any particular people as the chosen people or of any specific path. In fact on several occasions Guru Nanak exhorted the followers of other religions to search for the

[1]Ibid., p. 308.
[2]*Adi Granth*, p. 1188.

inner substance of their faith so as to be better Hindus or Muslim. In his positive spirit of understanding and consideration, Nanak was trying to provide his contemporaries with a new viewpoint and attachment which would enable them to understand the relative value of things in matters religious, to distinguish the fundamental from the secondary. Guru Nanak did not consider Hinduism and Islam as being fundamentally right or wrong but being composed of many elements, some pointing to truth, many away from it. He was bold enough to disapprove empty formalism, hypocrisy, conceit of religious personalities of every tradition, Hindu, Muslim or yogic, and condemned in a forthright manner whatever shocked his moral religious sensitivity. When Guru Nanak said that there was no Hindu and no Muslim he did not mean any prejudice to Islam or Hinduism nor their rejection. The purpose was to call the attention of all to the persistent fallacies of their respective faiths. Guru Nanak in fact aimed at offering correctives to the prevailing perversions and felt the necessity of freeing both the faiths from cultural restrictions. He was pointing towards a new socio-religious culture, inviting all to search for that spiritually vital core which lay beyond particularism of Islam and Hinduism. While retaining its distinct identity, Sikhism aspires towards universality of spirit and humanitarian cultural vision that would lead to peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding.

3

Guru Nanak and the Bhakti Movement

A study of the socio-political dimensions of Guru Nanak's movement would be incomplete without an assessment of the precise relationship in which Guru Nanak stood amongst other medieval *bhaktas*. Guru Nanak appeared in the midst of powerful religious currents and a process of constant conflict and religious interaction which, in turn shaped the medieval Bhakti movement. Guru Nanak was the epitome of this movement in Punjab, and naturally the inspirational source of his thought is provided by Nirguna ideology and its most prominent figurehead, Kabir. But that is not to suggest that he was merely repeating what he had inherited. While Guru Nanak is seen to accept and orientate certain existing parameters of Nirguna teachings, at the same time he brought into play a highly practical outlook backed by positive social outlook. In the process of systematization and reworking of Sant beliefs, Nanak made a number of departures and formulated a well-defined and coherent religious ethos that has a distinct character of its own. Originating from among the Sant sects of medieval Bhakti movement, the Sikh *panth* is the most formidable and institutionalized religious community that continues to exist as independent with a strong sense of distinctive identity and recognised as a separate religion. It would be in the fitness of things to examine the particular case of Nanak's Bhakti movement in Punjab in the sixteenth century, in its comparative historical context in the broad framework of medieval Bhakti movement.

A widespread and variegated religious phenomenon, medieval Bhakti movement covered a period of several centuries. The study of Bhakti movement has been carried on from many points of view viz., whether it was essentially indigenous or the result of extraneous influence such as Islam, its specific and comprehensive pattern of distinct socio-religious values, its philosophic or intellectual basis, its role as a kind of defence mechanism to safeguard Hindu society against challenge of Islam. R.S. Sharma[1] sees the correlation between medieval Bhakti and

[1]R.S. Sharma "Problem of Transition from Ancient to Medieval Indian History", *The Indian Historical Review*, vol.I, no.1, March 1974.

feudalism while Suvira Jaiswal[1] attempts to fix the "material basis" of Bhakti. Irfan Habib[2] has analysed the Bhakti movement, particularly its monotheistic movements of Nirguna saints, against the background of socio-economic and technological changes following the Turkish conquest of India. The radical wing of Bhakti movement was fundamentally egalitarian in spirit and scholars find an element of revolutionary change in their social message. A. Barannikov[3] refers to Bhakti movement as an instrument of social strength by dint of which "the community in bondage" could safeguard itself against the mighty oppressor. An attempt is also made to characterise the Bhakti movement as an urban movement which drew its strength from the "lower caste urban groups" and "the urban professional castes."[4] Satish Chandra[5] observes that it is misleading to call the monotheistic movements as "lower class movements" because they actually tried to draw their support from a wide social spectrum with multiclass support. In a recent work Krishna Sharma has called into question the whole conceptual framework and the basic terms of reference used hitherto for the study of Bhakti movement. According to her a restricted and erroneous definition of Bhakti has served as the substratum for all theorizations about the Bhakti movement, when taken as a whole.[6]

Notwithstanding the diversity of views expressed as to the nature of Bhakti movement, the fact remains that it was a multi-dimensional movement that weaved around itself a comprehensive and complex pattern of distinct strands of ideas and socio-religious practices.[7] While it is customary to discuss the Bhakti movement from an overall

[1]Suvira Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaishnavism*, p. 38.

[2]Irfan Habib, "The Historical Background of the Popular Monotheistic Movements of the 15th-17th Centuries." Paper presented at the seminar on the History of Ideas at Delhi University in November 1965.

[3]See English tr. of his introduction to Russian translation of *Rama-charitmanas* in Nagendra ed., *Tulsidas: His Mind and Art*, p. 14.

[4]Romila Thapar, op. cit., pp. 68, 264, 308.

[5]Satish Chandra, "Historical Background to the Rise of the Bhakti Movement in Northern India", Introductory chapter in Savitri Chandra's *Social Life and Concepts in Medieval Hindi Bhakti Poetry*, p. 18.

[6]Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective.*

[7]Among some brief references of Bhakti movement are J.T.F. Jordens, "Medieval Hindu Devotionalism", in A.L. Basham ed., *A Cultural History of India;* Eleanor Zelliot, "The Medieval Bhakti Movement in History: An essay on the Literature in English", in Bardwell Smith ed., *Hinduism, New Essays in the History of Religions*; S.C. Malik, ed., *Indian Movements: Some Aspects of Dissent Protest and Reform.* For a major collection of articles on saints including Kabir, Sikhs and some Maharashtrian saints, refer to Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod eds., *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India.*

perspective stressing its devotional fervour, there is evidently much variation due, no doubt, to differences in the object of worship, mode of devotion as well as variations of social context. Since the notion of *bhakti* was a theme common to all the saints, the movement has often been treated as a monolithic growth and dissimilar and contradictory trends have been cumulatively characterised as the Bhakti movement. This unitary approach amounted to ignoring the ideological differences between a Vaishnava *bhakta* like Tulsi and a Nirguna saint like Kabir. Though *bhakti* provided the principal source of inspiration for all the *bhaktas*, yet the Bhakti movement as such was not a uniform school of thought but "an amalgamation of a number of devotional movements of divergent nature." There were variations in the mode and nature of the object adored, sectarian and doctrinal differences, forces of conformism and dissent, conflict and contradictions; all these can be located in the medieval Bhakti movement of which both the Saguna *bhaktas* like Tulsi and Chaitanya and the Nirguna saints like Kabir, Nanak or Raidas were representatives. Often a saint belonging to one category exhibited emphasis on ideas, peculiar to the other also. For example, an attitude of protest against the caste system was characteristic feature of Nirguna school, and yet in Chaitanya too who was a worshipper of Krishna, there was a message of simple direct love for God and positive criticism and protest against priestly socio-religious monopoly as well as social injustices built into the caste system. Likewise, Tulsidas while keeping intact the basic framework of Brahminical order by upholding the sanctity of caste scriptures and Brahmins, also introduced a new mode of *bhakti* by assimilating the vital elements of low caste movement and emphasised that devotion to Lord Rama was the easiest way of salvation and was accessible to all devotees including the illiterate, low born, untouchables and poor people.[1]

In fact, in most human societies, the mass of people normally get satisfaction of their spiritual and emotional feelings by devotion to God who is not to be conceived as an invisible impersonal consciousness but rather a concrete manifestation with physical attributes to be worshipped and invoked for blessings. In case of Vaishnava *bhakti* the emphasis is on emotional feeling which fits in with rituals of idol worship because the *bhakti* of personalized deities like Rama and Krishna was possible only through idols and this further gave impetus to temple culture and invariably the domination of Brahmins. In short, the Vaishnavas took refuge behind their emotional-cum-ritualistic

[1]Tulsi, *Kavitavali*, 7/16, 10, 20, 62, 63, 66, 67, 69; 7/106; 7/107. Tulsi initiated a radical departure in the concept of *bhakti* and insisted that caste had no relevance in the matter of devotion. So long as one was sincerely devoted to Rama, caste creed did not matter.

devotion to personal deities. In the process of their intense exercises, they tended to minimize and deny, at least within the realm of devotion, inhibitions and discriminations of the caste without, however, jeopardising the hold of Brahminical supremacy and status quo of Varnashrama order.

The Bhakti cult provided the basic unifying element for Nirguna saints as well, but in several respects there were fundamental differences. It would be wrong to identify the Nirguna saints, of whom Guru Nanak was one of the leading but distinct from all of them, with the Vaishnava Bhakti movement as such. It is only the compositions of monotheistic saints like Kabir, Raidas, Namdev and others that found a place of recognition in the Sikh scripture along with those of Nanak and the Sikh Gurus. The connecting link between Guru Nanak and the Bhakti movement is not Vaishnava *bhaktas* but the Nirguna tradition of medieval India. Since the main source of Nanak's inspiration appears to have been the Nirguna ideology of protest and reform, it is relevant to note a few characteristic features of the latter. Although it is difficult to identify a definite core of motifs in the contents of all the saints yet they share many common themes. One finds a great commonality of ideas in Nirguna saints like Kabir, Raidas, Dadu, Namdev and others. On the metaphysical plane the saints upheld the concept of Nirguna Brahman and showed complete disregard for the anthropomorphic tradition of Vishnu or of his *avataras* including Rama and Krishna. Although the Nirguna saints like Kabir and Raidas used Vaishnava names for their supreme non-incarnate God, their devotion was not directed to Vishnu, Rama or Krishna. Kabir clearly and categorically affirms the belief in and devotion to impersonal Nirguna God.[1] His disregard for deities substantiates with greater emphasis his uncompromising stand. The absolute aspect of the nature of God is emphatically and repeatedly maintained by Ravidas. "He is one above though diffused in many ways; recall Him alone to your thoughts; he fills the creation."[2] Almost all the Nirguna saints clearly realized that true religious devotion depended on the direct realization of God within each person and they showed no respect for the Vaishnava rituals and beliefs.

The saints had no scholastic interest in controversies so strongly current in theology and metaphysics. Ceaseless verbal exposition of religious themes can destroy the real meaning and substance of religion. The saints, therefore, were of the view that true knowledge rests on personal self-realization and not scriptural authority. The real essence of faith can be lost in the bulk of writings. The devout and learned

[1]Kabir, *Granthavali*, pp. 50, 188; *Bijak*, Sabad 7.
[2]*Adi Granth*, Rag Gauri, p. 1295.

man must always use the touchstone of reason in his quest for self-realization because the knowledge of the Absolute requires serious contemplation.[1] Ravidas too emphasized that redeeming knowledge dawns with constant devotion.[2] Dadu also was not concerned with the revealed scriptures of the Hindus and Muslims nor was he willing to identify himself with any of the established schools of philosophy or religion. His concept of being a Muslim or Kafir implied possessing or lacking certain virtues. "Miyan Musalman really carries *kufr* in his heart, he has got involved in worldly matters. Dadu, *kafir* is one who tells lies, who does not recognise the Lord and has in him all deceptions".[3] The saints rejected the authority of the scriptures and upheld individual experience as a crucial test of God realization.

Irrespective of their absorption in *bhakti* and quest for self-realization, the saints were sensitive to their socio-religious milieu. They were outspoken critics of Hindu and Muslim religious and social establishments and their idiom of critique has passed into the common wisdom of Hindi speaking population. Equality and oneness of mankind was a central theme of their social philosophy. They challenged the Brahmins' claim of superiority over the other castes and their practice of untouchability and commensal taboos. Thus Kabir asked a Brahmin "if you claim to be a Brahmin by caste, born of a Brahminic, why are you not born in a different fashion".[4] All human beings have been formed out of the same dust and their creator is the same.[5] The Nirguna saints criticized the people of high castes for their notions of caste and asked them to shun their arrogance and avarice by following the precepts of the saints. Ravidas describes God as the cherisher, protector and uplifter of the downtrodden, who shows his grace without considerations of high and low.[6] He proclaimed, "God does not reside only in families where there are Vaishnava *sadhus*. He resides everywhere and does not distinguish between high caste and low caste; for Him Brahmin, Vaishya, Shudra, Chandala and Mleccha all are the same."[7] Maharashtrian saint Namdev too, though he lacks the vehemence of Kabir's staunch protests against the caste, insisted on the equality of all and unity of godhead.[8] It was Dadu who was very sensitive to tensions between different sects of Hindus and Muslims. He seriously advocated for reconciliation and put forward the path of *nipakh* which

[1]Kabir, *Granthavali*, op. cit., p. 88.
[2]*Adi Granth*, Ravidasa, p. 895.
[3]Dadu Dayal, *Granthavali*, 146/19.
[4]Kabir, *Bijak*, pada 41.
[5]Ibid., 55.
[6]*Adi Granth*, Sorathi, p. 658.
[7]Ibid., Rag Gujri, p. 425.
[8]Ibid., Namdev, Rag Tilang, 725, Rag Gond, 873, Rag Malar, 129.

implied "foresaking of the narrow limitations of sectarian beliefs and concentrating on the one Reality."[1]

A very characteristic feature of Nirguna saints was that they were family men and belonged to different professions. They make frequent references to their professional caste groups in their verses which suggest that they continued to pursue their ancestral professions. Kabir refers to himself as a Julaha (weaver), Ravidas as Chamar[2] (cobbler) and Dadu as a Dhunia[3] (cotton carder). These saints show an awareness of their own lowly status in their verses but since they had rejected the caste-system their followers no longer accepted the inferiority of their social status on account of their professions as required by the caste system. It is important to note that although the Nirguna saints were repeatedly referring to their low birth and professions they claimed that large sections of people including those holding high position were prepared to show respect to them. Ravidas, for example, says that he was a Chamar by caste and tanned the skin of dead animals near Benaras, yet Brahmins and *pradhans* (chiefs) saluted him.[4]

In short the concept of absolute as beyond human attributes (*Nirguna*/ formless), non-recognition of distinctions based on caste, rejection of false pursuations and ritualism based on scriptural authorities, propagation of and belief in equality of all men on the basis of faith in the oneness of all religions, are some of the main characteristics of the Nirguna saint tradition. The teachings of the saints like Kabir, Ravidas, Dadu and others, exhibit a uniformity of religious beliefs and social concepts notwithstanding the fact that their following led to formation of different sects. What was said by Abul Fazl about Kabir was true of most of them. According to Abul Fazl, Kabir was a *Muwahid* a monotheist who had discarded all outward customs of the age.[5] Notwithstanding a great commonalty of ideas, it is, however, not suggested that the Nirguna saints consciously undertook to formulate a system of organised philosophy, for they were not philosophers but mystic devotees whose

[1]Savitri Chandra, *Social Life and Concepts in Medieval Hindi Bhakti Poetry*, p. 29.

[2]*Adi Granth*, Ravidasa, p. 694.

[3]In the *Granthavali*, Dadu refers himself as a Pinjara, p. 455 and Dhunia, p. 477. Pinjara according to *Brihat Hindi Shabdakosh* means a cotton carder.

[4]*Adi Granth*, Ravidas Sorathi, p. 687.

[5]Abul Fazal, *Ain-i Akbari*, tr. Blochmann, p. 433. Mohsin Fani in his *Dabistan* discusses Kabir in the chapter on Bairagis but calls Kabir as an eminent *Muwahid*. *Dabistan*, p. 200. Ghalib, the celebrated Urdu poet (1869) explains what a *Muwahid* is in an interesting verse, "I am a *Muwahid*, I believe renouncing traditional practices; when religious differences disappear, the (remaining) essence becomes the basis of the (one true) faith", cf. S.A.A. Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movement in Northern India in 16th and 17th Centuries*, pp. 149-50.

unconscious philosophy supplied simply the background of their religious experience. The saints might have borrowed ideas to a lesser or greater extent from Islam and Hinduism which formed an integral part of their social environment, they also showed an innovative and critical attitude. They rebelled against the prevailing orthodoxies of belief and social institutions of both the religions. Their mode of thinking seems to suggest that their ideology was not an offshoot of either. According to Mcleod, "the Sant tradition was essentially a synthesis of the three principal dissenting movements, a compound of elements drawn mainly from Vaishnava *bhakti*, Hathayoga of the Nathas with a marginal contribution from the Sufis."[1]

The influence and assimilation of non-conformist and protestant attitude of Nathas in the Nirguna tradition is affirmed by many scholars. P.D. Barthwal, H.P. Dwiwedi and P. Chaturvedi demonstrate an intimate link between Kabir and the esoteric tradition of the Siddhas and the Nathas.[2] Krishna Sharma regards the Natha influence as the most preponderant of the sectarian influences on Nirguna *bhakti*.[3] Likewise, Vaudeville says that "the so-called Nirguna *bhakti* whose chief exponent was Kabir, appears to be so heavily indebted to the Nathapanthi form of yoga that Kabir's sayings can hardly be appreciated without reference to it."[4] The revolt of the saints against the formal ritualistic religion and their constant emphasis on the basic spirit and essence of religion is the same as that of Natha teachers. To be precise, what the Nirguna saints did was to effect a creative synthesis of love and devotional surrender of Vaishnava Bhakti cult, but minus their anthropomorphism, and of some of the ideas of the Nathapanthis and of the Sufi saints. However, although the saints borrowed ideas from several existing liberal and nonconformist movements, their criticism of the current social religious situation and their protest against it was much sharper than that of the leaders of Vaishnava *bhakti* and Sufi saints. Making a substantial departure from the traditional religion and social norms, the Nirguna saints initiated a crusade against Brahminical orthodoxy. According to Savitri Chandra, "In a highly authoritarian society ruled by precept and tradition their affirmation of the belief that individual apprehension of God was the basis of true religion amounted integrally to dissent and opposition to the prevailing social, economic and political systems."[5]

[1]W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, p. 152.

[2]P.D. Barthwal, op. cit.; H.P. Dwiwedi, *Kabir*; P. Chaturvedi, *Kabir Sahitya Ki Parakh*.

[3]Krishna Sharma, op. cit., p. 184.

[4]Ch. Vaudeville, *Kabir*, p. 121.

[5]Savitri Chandra, op. cit., p. 71.

The aforesaid Nirguna saint tradition of medieval Bhakti movement was represented in Punjab by Guru Nanak. The trend to equate Nanak with the mystic metaphysics of the Vedantic Bhakti cult as being preached and practised by Nirguna saints like Kabir, has overshadowed the interpretations of most Sikh and non-Sikh scholars who regard Nanak's faith as merely one of the reformatory sects within the fold of the medieval religious movements. They fail to understand and appreciate the revolutionary role of Nanak as also the fact that he imparted distinct and specific socio-political dimensions to the Bhakti movement in the Punjab. It is my endeavour to project that although the message of Guru Nanak had been of Hindu extraction and he might have received immediate inspiration from some of the progressive and dynamic trends of the Nirguna saints yet he was the initiator of a religious movement which had a distinct identity of its own, giving rise to developments from within the Hindu society which amounted to a conscious critique and practical rejection of Hindu society. The social impact of the popular Nirguna Bhakti movement tended not to envisage major structural changes but rather modifications and adjustments within the framework of Hindu orthodoxy. While the saints were generally explicitly critical of Hindu socio-religious establishment, it was only the Sikh movement of Guru Nanak which effected major changes in and separation from the environing Hindu society. It was Nanak who sought more than any other medieval saint to make specific departures from Hinduism and what finally emerged was a distinct faith, not a sect within the fold of Hinduism.

For comparative significance of Guru Nanak's contribution to the Bhakti movement, a comparison with Kabir, the most prominent of the saints before Nanak, is most relevant for this would bring into higher relief the distinctive features and implications of Nanak's movement. The possibility of a meeting between the two is taken by some as an established fact.[1] Encounters between Kabir and Nanak are to be found in *Janam Sakhis* also but their obvious purpose would appear to be to exalt Nanak by making Kabir acknowledge the former's greatness.[2] Another view is that Guru Nanak did not meet Kabir but he knew the works of Kabir,[3] and the similarities found between the

[1]F.E. Keay, *Kabir and His Followers*, pp. 27-28; Ahmed Shah, *Bijak of Kabir*, pp. 34-35; Khazan Singh, *History and Philosophy of Sikhism*, p. 82; Lajwanti Ram Sharma, *The Sikhs*, p. 59; K.S. Lal, *Twilight of the Sultanate*, p. 300.

[2]*Meharban Janam Sakhi*, pp. 154-56, MS 40, folio 136.

[3]Trumpp, *The Adi Granth*, p. xcvii; Monier-Williams, *Brahmanism and Hinduism*, p. 162; G.H. Wescott, *Kabir and the Kabir Panth*, p. 22; J.E. Carpenter, *Theism in Medieval India*, p. 474; Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, p. 31; Vaudeville, *Kabir*, p. 89; S.M. Ikram, *Muslim Civilization in India*, p. 127; Malcolm, *Sketch of Sikhs*, p. 145.

works of Nanak and Kabir have been taken as a proof of the fact that Nanak had access to some of the compositions of Kabir.[1] Although there is no evidence to support the meeting between the two, it cannot be denied that the prominence given to the verses of Kabir in the *Adi Granth*, the similarities between their teachings and also the popular lores about verbal correspondence between them seem to confirm that Guru Nanak was familiar with the compositions of Kabir and was inspired and influenced by his teachings. There is a great deal of similarity between the ideological commitment of Kabir and Nanak. On the metaphysical plane both were staunch monotheists and were against the anthropomorphic traditions of the Vaishnavas. Both rely on the authority of personal experience and regard philosophical and theological controversies as irrelevant and point out the meaninglessness of scholastic knowledge in religion. Guru Nanak's social characteristics are also similar to those of Kabir and may be traced to the some Nirguna tradition of 'protest and dissent' that forms the basis of Kabirism. Besides the commonalty of ideas, even the terminologies, similes and imagery used by Nanak often bear a resemblance with those of Kabir. So does the direct and sharp reasoning both use for demolishing the prevalent faith in the meaningless rituals which had enjoyed age-old religious sanctions. Besides both were critical of Brahminical pretensions and social evils arising out of caste distinctions. Challenging the Brahmin's claim of superiority over others, Kabir asked him, "Do you have milk in your veins while we have blood in ours. If not, how are you a Brahmin and we Shudras".[2] It has been suggested by Hazari Prasad[3] that Nanak's lack of vehemence against caste was the result of his having been born in a caste-status which spared him the indignities experienced by Kabir. The argument ignores the fact that Ravidas whose social status was lower than that of Kabir manifested the same mildness as seen in Guru Nanak. The fact is that though Nanak's expressions may seem mild as compared to the sarcastic denunciations of Kabir, yet in the former too there is a clear and emphatic emphasis against the caste as also against the hypocrisy of both the Brahmins and upholders of Muslim orthodoxy i.e., the *mullahs* and the *qazis*.

Guru Nanak seems to have inherited and supplemented Kabir's strong ideology of social reform, but it would be wrong to infer that the former had passed off the work of another saint as his own for such an inference would undermine the substantive originality of Nanak's work irrespective of the fact that he had inherited the Nirguna tradition

[1]This has been argued by Sahib Singh in his commentary on Kabir *padas* included in the *Adi Granth*, see Sahib Singh, *Salok Bhagat Kabirji*, p. 65.

[2]Kabir, *Bijak*, pada 42.

[3]Hazari Prasad, *Hindi Sahitya*, p. 150.

transmitted by Kabir. He might indeed have much in common with Kabir and other saints yet what emerged as a result of his mission was a distinct phenomenon and not just Kabirism. Through his teachings and utterances, as recorded in the *Granth Sahib*, Nanak was instrumental in leaving a body of compositions that authenticated his faith and the way of life prescribed by him. He wanted to give a socially institutionalized form to what he preached. As such, one can visualize a conscious and deliberate attempt on his part to build up the Sikh community of his disciples as a distinct and different one from the caste order of the Hindus. The followers of Nanak developed not only a separate sectarian identity but also a separate religious identity. This is precisely where other saints differed and lagged behind Nanak.

The evaluation of Guru Nanak's position *vis-à-vis* the medieval Nirguna saints, gives rise to a very important question as to why the movements of saints like Kabir and Ravidas failed to bring radical social transformation in their own regions while the message of Guru Nanak succeeded in holding to its distinct identity. Both in terms of rigours of Brahminism and sufferance caused by the caste taboos, areas around Benaras were victims of untouchability and ritualism. Benaras was a great centre of Brahminical orthodoxy and Sanskrit learning, a "centre of theological controversies",[1] as Abul Fazl was to call it. A number of European travellers took notice of its ritualistic culture and Bernier named it "Athens of India."[2] The significance of Benaras lay in the fact that on the one hand it contained a large population of various categories of Brahmins, thus making it a stronghold of Hindu orthodoxy, and on the other it also contained a large number of weavers, artisans and those of various types of professions because of its being a centre of temple-building activity, trade and commerce. Thus Benaras while it provided the basis of ideological conflict within Brahmins, also served as a social base for the movement launched by Kabir and Ravidas. The verses of Kabir and, to a lesser degree, those of Ravidas reflect their protest and resentment against the glaring social evils as manifest in Benaras. Lower classes in general and particularly the growing class of artisans in northern India were dissatisfied with rigours of the caste and lent support to the egalitarian movements sponsored by saints like Kabir, Ravidas and later by Nanak. Prof. Satish Chandra has argued that it is misleading to call these movements simply as lower-class movements. 'The popular monotheistic movements were complex movements with multiclass support. While, we may broadly call them popular in the sense that they reflected the attitude and aspirations of the people to a certain extent, they actually

[1]Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, II, tr. Jarret, p. 158.
[2]Bernier, *Travels in India*, ed. William Crooke, p. 142.

tried to draw their support from a wide social spectrum."[1] In fact, the nature of the movements is indicated by the audience of the monotheistic teachers. Though they had substantial popular support, their message was not meant for the elite and higher castes and classes. Kabir particularly had a large following among the lower castes and the time and place of his activity were conducive to the development of a full-fledged anti-caste movement. Even so, surprisingly enough, he could not create a dent in the citadel of orthodoxy. With the passage of time, the intensity of the movement for castelessness gave way to attempt at securing social legitimacy within the fold of orthodox caste ridden society. A number of legends developed seeking higher caste status for Kabir[2] and Raidas[3]. The assimilation of the radical movement into the fold of Brahminical order was largely due to a powerful reaction of orthodoxy that tried to mitigate the intensity of their movement and absorb it in its fold and the lack of sufficient vigour on the part of the protagonists of the movement to fight back the forces of the orthodoxy.

The distinctive character of Nanak's movement lay in the fact that though faced with a similar challenge from orthodoxy, yet it succeeded in avoiding absorption in the fold of the Brahminical order. Nanak's success was not due to any particular circumstances and environmental differences from those of the saints. The difference lay essentially in the performance of his social role for "If the seed be of the same variety it would not bear a different fruit, howsoever, variant the impact of environmental and ecological conditions. If the message and performance were the same, these would not produce divergence in reaction and value system among people."[4] The inevitable inference is that evidently there is a great deal of difference in the performance of the social role of Nanak and that of other saints. Whereas Nanak was imbibed with a strong sense of social commitment, Kabir did not organize or systematize the social part of his message as an activist reformer. Reading through the *dohas* of Kabir in the *Kabir Granthavali* and the *Adi Granth*, one gets the impression that he was not so much concerned with temporal affairs as was Nanak. For example, the former does not refer to the state or the ruler except to say that saints should

[1]Satish Chandra, Historical Background to the Rise of the Bhakti Movement in North India: Introduction to Savitri Chandra's *Social Concepts in Medieval Hindi Bhakti Poetry*, p. 18.

[2]See K.N. Divedi, *Kabir and Kabir Panthis*. Popular stories describing Kabir as a disciple of Ramananda have been taken by Vaudeville as a later development connecting Kabir with Ramananda. Vaudeville, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

[3]Shastri and Pandey, *Sant Ravidas Aur Unka Kavya* (Hindi), p. 55.

[4]Daljit Singh, *Sikhism, A Comparative Study of Its Theology and Mysticism*, p. 168.

not seek their favour.[1] Guru Nanak boldly condemned the rulers for their injustice, high handedness and moral depravity.[2]

The issue of socio-political responsibility constitutes an important criteria between Nirguna saints and the Sikh Gurus. Kabir and other radical saints, while differing from the Vaishnavas, differ equally in their social emphasis from the Sikh Gurus. From the overall point of view the gap between Sikh Gurus and radical mystics in quite marked than even in the case of the latter and the Vaishnava school of *bhakti*. Ranade observes: "Medieval mystics of the period show an all absorbing love of God which would not allow a rightful performance of one's social duties before God's absorption. The conflict between rightful performance of social obligations and all absorbing love of the Absolute has existed at all times in most countries but it seems that the saints of this period too, were inclined towards the latter than the former direction and exhibited an all absorbing character of God realization."[3] The thought of Kabir, Dadu, Raidas and others, whatever be the ideological significance of their radical attitude of protest, does not show active social involvement as that of Nanak. The other saints affirmed the fundamental unity of God and equality of human creation and condemned exploitation of lower classes, yet they implicitly accepted the division of society into castes and classes. They were dissatisfied with society and its malfunctioning but radical social change was not their forte. They accepted the class-structure of society, advocating, however, a social equilibrium. Dadu for example, would like different classes to function more honestly and efficiently.[4] His thought was not that of protest but seemed to be that of resignation.[5] He disapproved of any conflict in society.[6] According to Harbans Mukhia, "It was too early to expect Dadu or for that matter the leaders of Bhakti movement as a whole to be the harbingers of change, their great following among the masses notwithstanding."[7] The extent to which these movements asserted the unity of God and unity of being; they might be accepted as spiritual endeavours to insulate the individual from the pain and suffering by an unjust social order which otherwise they found beyond redemption. While due to their efforts there was an easing of tensions in a society that was fragmented due to the caste system and which further got

[1]Kabir, *Sakhi*, 17/6.
[2]See *Adi Granth*, Rag Asa, pp. 417-18.
[3]R.D. Ranade, *The Rise of Marathas and other Essays*, p. 59.
[4]Dadu, op. cit., p. 151/28.
[5]Ibid., 422/*pada* 4.
[6]Ibid., pp. 177-78.
[7]Harbans Mukhia, "The Ideology of the Bhakti Movement in History and Society", *Essays in Honour of Professor Niharranjan Ray*, ed. D.P. Chattopadhyaya, p. 451.

fragmented, after the entry of Islam, into two main communities; there could be no dent in the citadel of orthodoxy. Their attitude was radical only to the extent that they sought social readjustments as a result of socio-economic changes accelerated by the Turkish conquest of North India. It was left for the Sikh Gurus to fill the inherent lacunae in their social message. In case of the Sikh movement, a distinct social order was envisaged and set up by Nanak. It was a break from the earlier organizational patterns common to various sects broadly adhering to *bhakti*. The Sikh movement became a vehicle of protest against the social injustice caused by the Brahminical order. Subsequently it also contributed to the formation of an opposition force against the aggression of the rulers.

The characteristic distinction between Kabir and Nanak is also seen in the fact that is the former was dedicated to a solitary spiritual quest while the latter was a religious organiser laying the foundations of a solid community of householders. Despite the numerous utterances of Kabir which ridicule professional ascetics and deny that salvation requires cutting oneself from family life, there are a large number of *dohas* which reveal a strong ascetic theme supporting an individualistic mystical religion. It is also expressed in the form of tirade against woman who is characterized as *Kalinagini* (a black cobra), *Kunda narakha* (the pit of hell), *Juttani jagat ki* (the refuse of the world),[1] and is seen as an impediment to spiritual enlightenment. Guru Nanak envisaged revolutionary transformation in the position of woman for she was not only not inferior to man but had equal status and responsibility before God.[2] He assigned to woman an equal place in the spiritual and secular pursuits and this may be related to the fact the he gave prominence to religious themes supportive of a community of householders rather than solitary spiritual seekers. Kabir had preached against asceticism but there was no marked socio-political growth of Kabirpanthis. This because Kabir, though a householder, was essentially absorbed in depths of mystical experience. Utterances pointing to the ecstasies of mystical experience are not totally absent in Nanak but they are not suggestive of other worldliness. There was a categoric and repeated emphasis by the Sikh Gurus on dissuading their followers from renouncing active social life. In so far as it eschews asceticism, Nanak's faith makes man responsible in an active sense to the society in which one is supposed to live. Devotion and submission to God do not imply in Sikhism a complete or partial extinction of personality, but in the reawakening of man's responsibility in the world of His creation. The true religious man, according to the Sikh faith, is one who lives in the

[1]Kabir, *Granthavali*, 30.2, 30.16, 30.20.
[2]*Adi Granth*, p. 722.

world and becomes an active vehicle for promoting well-being of others. "I have learnt by the light of the Master that recluse, celibates, sannyasis—none may expect to earn merit without devoted service in this world, a service in which lies the essence of *bhakti.*"[1] In fact, Nanak took into consideration the socio-temporal viz., the material aspects of life with seriousness. The emphasis on secular facets of life generated a positive outlook on life among his followers.

The distinction maintained throughout in this discussion of Kabir and Guru Nanak in no way implies any essential difference between the two from the standpoint of ideology. This has been done only to bring out the qualitative difference that exists between the two in terms of their respective social roles and the implications of their movements and not to minimise the tremendous contribution of Kabir. His influence and popularity spread far beyond his own region. His teachings were echoed in Punjab and the author of *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* testifies to the continued influence and popularity of Kabir among people of North India in the sixteenth century.[2] J.N. Farquhar was surely not far off the point when he said of Kabir, "His best utterances are probably the loftiest works in the Hindi language and hundreds of his couplets have laid hold of the common heart of Hindustan."[3] The impact of Kabir on the subsequent liberal movements of Nanak, Dadu, Raidas etc. was considerable. His teachings led to the loosening of rigours in the society. The achievement of Kabir, it may however be added, does not go very far beyond this. Religion for Kabir was a mystic quest and there is no evidence that his criticisms would actively change the conditions; nor did he ever try to institutionalise his radical message in a systematic manner. Unlike him Guru Nanak possessed and displayed an acute awareness of the social situation and urgency of change. Nanak had definitely transcended Kabir's social perspective and had gone ahead with setting in a current of practical change and reform. In this process, he organized a considerable body of people into a community of followers committed to new social values. No wonder, Nanak's message and plan of action took him far beyond what was achieved by any of Nirguna or for that matter Vaishnava saints of the Bhakti movement. According to Carpenter,

> Kabir, Nanak and Chaitanya were born almost in the same era but of these the first had a significant influence and the third a very attractive personality. But if we think of them by the results of their work, it will have to be admitted that it was only the second saint Nanak whose work was really distinguished and practical.[4]

[1]Ibid., p. 992.
[2]Mohsin Fani, *Dabistan-i Mazahib*, p. 266.
[3]J.N. Farquhar, *Oriental Religions*, p. 333.
[4]J.E. Carpenter, *Theism in Medieval India*, p. 488.

A comparison with Vaishnava saint Chaitanya may not be out of place because Chaitanya's Bhakti movement resembles that of Guru Nanak in many ways. In terms of social content, Chaitanya is the only Vaishnava saint who stands close to Guru Nanak. He can be cited as the only example of a Vaishnava saint who led an effective crusade against the caste system and his movement had wide social dimensions transcending caste differences. A meeting between the two is taken as a strong possibility though there is no evidence that either of them had drawn inspiration from the other. According to the Sikh accounts[1] Guru Nanak visited Puri in the year 1566 Bikrami, corresponding to March-April 1510. Biman Bihari Majumdar[2] informs us on the authority of Ishwardas Gaya's *Chaitanya Bhagavat* that Nanak had met Chaitanya at Puri.[3] According to Sir Jadunath Sarkar,[4] Chaitanya was initiated as a sannyasi with the name of Krishna Chaitanya in January 1510 by Keshav Bharati. Having taken to the life of sannyas, he set out on a pilgrimage, and with some halts on his way, he is said to have arrived at Puri in the beginning of July 1510.[5] In the light of contemporary evidence and views of modern scholars, a strong possibility of a meeting between Chaitanya and Nanak may not be ruled out. However, sufficient convincing evidence is not available to permit any categorical affirmation.

Both Chaitanya and Nanak played decisive roles in shaping the medieval Bhakti movement. Both of them formulated their teachings against the background of Islamic influence on Hindu religion and culture. Born amidst social conservatism and moral decadence, both Chaitanya and Nanak had protested against the existing values of the age. Chaitanya's *modus operandi* to bring about social reform was not different from that of Guru Nanak and in terms of organization and planning of their respective movements, both had adopted simple methods for propagation of their social message. As humanists, both recognized the divinity of every man and as such pleaded for social equality. Chaitanya said in this regard, "Honour every living being for Krishna dwells in every one's heart."[6] According to him even "A Chandala

[1]Kahan Singh, *Guru Sabad Rathnakar Mahankosh*, p. 355.

[2]Biman Bihari Majumdar, *Chaitanya Charitamrit.*

[3]Biman Bihari Majumdar has quoted the following passage where Nanak is mentioned as partaking in *kirtan* with Chaitanya and devotees "Vissamohara (Chaitanya) the resort of the world takes delight in *kirtan*. He sang with Nanak and *saranga,* the two brothers Rup and Sananda Jaga and Madha. All of them dance while partaking in *kirtan*" (*Chaitanya Bhagavat*, p. 500). The word *saranga* perhaps refers to *sarangi* or *rabab* player i.e., Mardana whose proper name was not likely to be known to Bengali author.

[4]J.N. Sarkar, *Chaitanya, His Life Time and Teachings,* p. 13.

[5]This coincides with Nanak's stay in Puri, according to *Mahankosh* Guru Nanak arrived there in March. 1510.

[6]Krishnadas, *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, ch. 20, p. 73.

may be considered superior to all Brahmins if he is pious and recites the name of God."[1] "He who knows the Truth is alone entitled to be a *guru*, he may be a Brahmin or even a Shudra."[2] Thus he recognized the individual merit and potentiality of man above his caste status. Like Nanak, Chaitanya maintained social connections with lower castes, unhesitatingly eating the food cooked by them and thus breaking all caste rules of inter-dining.[3] Not only that, he had even discarded his *shikha* (tuft of hair) and *sutra* (sacred thread) the very symbol of Brahmin-hood.[4] These were unpardonable social offences from the standpoint of Hindu orthodoxy but Chaitanya showed no concern for public opinion and even his followers studiously ignored the caste rules and taboos on inter-dining. All this can be directly linked with the massive permeation of Chaitanya's radical ideals within the fold of the Vaishnava brotherhood that emerged in Bengal as a result of his preachings. Many of the followers of Chaitanya managed to shed caste-consciousness and even went to the extent of accepting preceptors from lower castes.

Like Nanak, a conscious pattern of planning and organization coupled with missionary zeal is attributed to Chaitanya. He insisted on the need for a "more egalitarian social gospel, preached socially rebellious thoughts and insisted that need to leave Varnashrama-dharma formed an essential pre-requisite for worship of Krishna."[5] His social philosophy spelt a reaction among holders of the traditional orthodoxy and the Brahmins felt alarmed and sharply reacted to the heterodox ways of the Vaishnavas. To quote a few instances, "In the name of Chaitanya, they call upon 36 castes to dine in the same place, and the pariah, the washerman, the oilman and the Kotwal all sit down cheerfully to dinner without observing any distinctions of caste."[6] Again, "There is no fun in witnessing their *kirtan*, it appears as if hundreds of them (Vaishnava) have assembled to fight, thereafter they would prepare a desert out of cooked rice, bananas, curd etc. and all would eat together and lose their caste status."[7] Notwithstanding fierce reaction, the Vaishnava leader went ahead with his gospel. According to Chatterjee, "The social ideals of Chaitanya brought about a renaissance among

[1]Vrindavan Das, *Chaitanya Bhagavat*, ch. 1, p. 98.

[2]Krishnadas, op. cit., ch. 8, p. 304.

[3]Vrindavan, op. cit., ch. 10, p. 334.

[4]Ibid., ch. 10, p. 153. Guru Nanak expressed similar views about sacred thread, see *Adi Granth*, Rag Asa, p. 477.

[5]A.K. Chatterjee, "Sri Chaitanya Sect," *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, 1980, p. 290.

[6]Dasrantha Ray quoted in D.C. Sen's *History of Bengali Literature*, pp. 491-92.

[7]Vrindavana Das, op. cit., ch. 8, p. 143.

the masses of the people while refining and polishing the manner and character of prevalent society."[1]

Thus the growth of Vaishnava movement in Bengal represents an almost parallel framework to that of Nanak's movement in Punjab. There is a lot of similarity in some of their emphases. Chaitanya and other Vaishnava leaders, like Nanak, did a great service by upholding the cause of women and improving their position in society. As against the established traditions there was no bar against the initiation of women, and the women devotees enjoyed full rights with men in the movements of both Chaitanya and Nanak. Besides, women Vaishnavas, in general, received a fair education and in time to come they were to act as instructors of the *outside* female community. Not only that, Vaishnava community exhibited a rare liberalism in so far as widow remarriage was permitted amongst the Vaishnavas overriding all considerations of caste.[2]

Both Nanak and Chaitanya laid emphasis on *satsang*[3] or *sankirtan*[4] that is pursuance of religion as a group and not as an individual. Congregational form of worship based on singing of devotional hymns was stressed by Chaitanya and Nanak, the latter, however, cautioned against extreme ecstasies and trances of the Vaishnavas. In the prayer assembly of Chaitanya's followers, the Shudras and untouchable came in contact with higher castes and like Sikh *sangats* no prejudices or discriminations were exhibited. Parallel can also be drawn between *langar* or community dining among the Sikhs and *Mahotsava*[5] of the Vaishnavas, when the entire community chanced to eat together, hundreds of them sitting together in long rows without distinctions of caste.

In this respect Chaitanya's movement traversed common ground with Guru Nanak and reduced the importance of caste in conformity with the spirit of Nirguna saints. In spite of obvious parallels between the teachings, particularly social philosophy, of Chaitanya and Guru Nanak, one wonders as to why there is not a single reference to Chaitanya in the *Adi Granth*. The non-reference to Chaitanya is perhaps

[1]A.N. Chatterjee, *Sri Krishna Chaitanya*, p. 177.

[2]Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Chaitanya's Life and Teachings*.

[3]*Satsang* is a gathering of the Sikhs both for religious discourses and singing of hymns from the *Adi Granth*.

[4]*Sankirtan* is purely for singing of devotional songs and was often marked by intensive emotional involvement on the part of Vaishnavas.

[5]A *Mahotsava*, could be arranged at any time on any occasion and at any place i.e. a temple opening ceremony, the birth anniversary or funeral ceremony of a Vaishnava etc. Some times a rich man would celebrate it, often a poor Vaishnava would do so. The dinner might not have been rich but the invitation was not confined to a limited number of people. It was for all, it may be called a feast of uninvited, everyone irrespective of caste was welcome.

due to the difference between monotheism of the Sikh Gurus and the incarnate concept of God in Bengal Vaishnavism. The cardinal point in the Sikh doctrine is the concept of absolute God who is formless, but Lord Krishna for Vaishnavas is not *Nirankar* (without a form). Chaitanya describes God as *Chidakara* i.e., possessing a form and spiritual body.[1]

The main difference between Nanak's faith and Bengal Vaishnavism is that the position of Chaitanya's movement is somewhat nebulous because it was not uniform and contained elements of reform as well as conformism to traditional values and concepts. As aptly put by Joseph T. O'Connell, "The devotees of Chaitanya's Vaishnava movement thus maintained a two-faced or two-tiered stance toward social relationships: egalitarian effectively with fellow devotees in devotional (sacred) situations: inegalitarian functionality (even with fellow devotees) in mundane (profane) situations. This stance may not have been heroic from the viewpoint of social ethics, but it was neither confused nor inconsistent nor for that matter, peculiar."[2] In fact from the very beginning the community of Vaishnavas in Bengal consisted of two sections, one continuing its loyalty to socio-religious aspects of the orthodox Brahminical system and the other to unorthodox practices particularly denying inhibitions of caste in devotional exercises and inter-dining. These contradictory developments were perhaps largely due to the fact that Chaitanya's movement seems to have had relatively a greater preponderance of Brahmins in position of leadership than did the Sikh movement. Fortunately for Sikhism, the limited entry of Brahmins in its fold kept it comparatively free from the traditional influences. Whereas a large number of Khatris were drawn into the fold of Sikhism, Brahmins generally kept aloof from the new religion. This is easily understandable in view of Nanak's strong stand against caste and supremacy of Brahmins. Chaitanya's movement could not remain free from infiltration of orthodox Brahminical elements for long. Thus the radical potentialities of Bengal Vaishnavism were mitigated by the infectious germs of orthodoxy within its fold. Soon after Chaitanya's death, perhaps even before that, the Brahminical interpretations of his message by the Goswamis of Vrindavan pushed the nascent community back into the diverse fold of Brahminical Hinduism. Further, conflicting

[1]The result was a natural recognition of image-worship of Lord Krishna by vast majority of Vaishnavas though the Vaishnavas often emphasised the idea derived from *Bhagavat Purana* that Krishna was God, not an incarnate.

[2]Joseph, T. O'Connell, "Do Bhakti Movements Change Hindu Social Structures. The case of Chaitanya's Vaishnavas in Bengal", pp. 26-27, paper presented at a Seminar on *The Historical and Contemporary Character of Hinduism* held on March 19-23, 1986, Nehru Memorial Museum, Teen Murti, New Delhi.

commentaries on Chaitanya's message obscured the originality of his radical and potent message. Bengal Vaishnavism did not provide its votaries with an authoritative nucleus of scripture like the *Adi Granth* of the Sikhs. By far the most important single factor that distinguishes Sikhism from Chaitanya's movement was that the followers of Nanak were able to organize themselves under the shelter and inspiration of the central authority of Gurus. The institution of Guru-ship provided social cohesion and preserved the uniformity of doctrines. It was an excellent means of promoting solidarity and community consciousness. The institutionalization and charisma of Guru-ship also helped to preserve the revealed truth from distortion by unworthy teachers and detractors. In fact Chaitanya's movement like that of Nanak had wide social dimensions, it came nearer to a religion, but it remained at best a cult within the framework of Brahminical Hinduism, Sikhism on the other hand acquired an autonomous status as a new faith.

An assessment of Guru Nanak's role *vis-à-vis* Kabir and Chaitanya enables one to appreciate his role in a broad perspective of the totality of medieval Bhakti movement. Nanak's main contribution in the sphere of religion has been highlighted time and again i.e. his emphatic belief in unqualified monotheism which meant total elimination of respect for incarnations, deities and idol worship. J.N. Farquhar observes that "Nanak's system was practically identical with that of the Vaishnava sect; however, unlike Vaishnava saints he condemned incarnations and protested against idol worship."[1] Banerjee adds that the "*Bhaktas* in general were a less consistent in this regard, their liberal use of religious mythology and tradition kept the door open for worship of many gods and observances of idolatrous rituals.[2] The other Nirguna saints started with a strong note of monotheism but their followers subsequently reverted to mythology. Sikhism, however, remained distinct from Ramaite and Krishnaite *bhakti* schools because of its over-whelmingly strong insistence on monotheism and its no-compromise with Hindu mythology attitude.

A very distinguishing feature of Guru Nanak's vision which has not been properly recognised is that he sought more effectively and seriously than any of the *bhaktas* to purge Hinduism of its ritualism and formalism. Nirguna saints like Kabir, Raidas, Dadu and others did protest vehemently against the high-handedness of the Brahmins and falsity of Hindu ritualism. Their radical message had generated in the masses passion for change and reform and even left behind certain intellectual formulations like the conviction in the harmony of all existence and the consequential recognition of the brotherhood of mankind, yet the general religious belief and society were left undisturbed.

[1]J.N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, p. 336.
[2]A.C. Banerjee, op. cit., p. 187.

Guru Nanak's revolutionary vision called into question the very basis of orthodoxy and repudiated the sanctity of the scriptures, incarnations, idol worship and the ideology of the caste. The nature of his challenge placed him outside Hinduism and his message led to practically a new religion and not merely a reformatory sect as was the case with most of the devotional movements of medieval India.

Again it was Guru Nanak alone who gave a distinct shape to his anti-caste programme. Although the saints did protest against the caste yet their idea of equality of all was more in the nature of a protest against the Brahminical ban on the lower castes being admitted to the rights of equality in religious worship than an attempt to eliminate the caste system itself. Nanak pursued his anti-caste movement to its rational end without caring for popular religious sentiments and social comments. He showed no hesitation in derecognising the sanctity attached by the Brahmins to the caste system and not only condemned it verbally but took the practical step of reconstruction of an alternate social organization. His social ideology had a stronger appeal because he provided an effective workshop for realization of equality on egalitarian ideals in the community he created. If he said that all men are equal, he established *Guru ka langar* or community kitchen emphasizing true fellowship and fraternity. Likewise the institution of *sangat* had not only the levelling and equalizing effect but it also strengthened cohesion among his followers. Thus Nanak aimed directly and specifically at removing social injustice resulting from the caste.[1] Both the institutions of *sangat* and *langar* promoted, in time to come, fraternity and social solidarity among the Sikhs. This aspect of Nanak's work must be distinguished and regarded as a primary factor in the development of Sikhism as a faith with a distinct individuality, providing a basis for a socio-religious organization (*panth*) with a personality of its own.

Just as the process of formation of a new faith was commenced by Nanak, so also he proceeded to set up effective means for its guardship and continuity. Neither the *sangat* nor the nomination of a successor was a mere accident, but an integral part of his broad programme of social change. The nomination of a successor clearly indicated his intention of giving his followers organizational solidarity. "It gave Sikhism a definite leadership which could not but be of supreme significance in the history of its evolution.... The Guru-ship came to acquire in Sikhism a meaning quite its own and the predominant personality of Guru provided a nucleus around which the Sikh *panth* could gradually arise."

A very significant aspect where Guru Nanak stands in a different position from that of the other *bhaktas* is his flush of political consciousness. He did not easily provide legitimacy to the decadent

[1]For Guru Nanak's anti-caste movement refer to ch. 4.

institutionalism of the state. Though he kept aloof from politics, he showed great awareness of the political turmoil in society. No other reformer looked upon political problems as forceful factors leading to decline in moral standards. But Nanak clearly emphasized that a corrupt political system has in it germs of its dissolution. He openly condemned the prevailing political conditions, tyranny and injustice of the rulers. Before Guru Nanak's advent in Punjab, a fatalistic attitude to life had developed which prevented emergence of necessary vision or power to grapple with socio-political problems that had been caused by the consolidated conquest of India by Islam. This was further strengthened by passive doses of *bhakti*-temper, which tended to provide an ideological legitimization to the political isolation of the medieval Hindu society. The mystical self merger or union with divine was sought in a way which, in its sociological undertones, amounted to abject and absolute surrender to established authority, spiritual and temporal. Guru Nanak categorically denied such an attitude. The Sikh movement with its own distinctively new ideology sought to make spiritual communion with God as the requisite basis for ending of socio-political alienation of the community. Guru Nanak insisted that a spiritual man had a moral duty to respond to evils around him. Political aggression should not be ignored. In other words, this new attitude consisted in the recognition of socio-political environments and an awareness in man to resist evils and induce in others an attitude of mind to do likewise. In the *Babur-Bani*, Guru Nanak regretted the inadequate response of victims who relied on esoteric prayers and magical spells of *pirs* who failed to stop and blind the Mughals.[1]

Tulsidas can be cited as the only example from amongst the medieval *bhaktas* who, like Nanak, shows an awareness of political reality. For example, Tulsi deals at length with the qualities of a good ruler[2] and, according to him, the happiness of people depended on the qualities of a good ruler.[3] A good ruler according to Tulsi could be obtained by people only by their good fortune.[4] But the nature of political awareness in the works of Tulsidas stands out as different from that of Nanak. The former does not censure the rulers directly. On the contrary, he gives an impression that those in power should not be resisted. Guru Nanak clearly condemns the rulers and officials for their injustice and immorality.[5] Guru Nanak instead of projecting kings and oppressive political administrative structure as being designed by the divine decree,

[1]*Adi Granth*, Rag Asa, 417-18.
[2]Tulsi, *Manasa* 1/16/1, 2/172, 2/317, 3/255/3, 303/3; doha 530.
[3]*Kavitavali*, 7/96-97.
[4]*Kavitarah*, dohas 332, 333, 408.
[5]Political thought and dimensions of Nanak's faith are being discussed in a separate chapter.

declares them as evil with which there should not be any reconciliation. Moreover by predicting God as *Nirbhau* (fearless).[1] Nanak was not only describing an attribute of Divine Being, but also inculcating in the minds of his followers the spirit of fearlessness towards established political authority. "May I hold none in fear nor may I owe to fear of any one."[2] In this condition no one submits to high handedness and exploitation nor one has a chance to dominate others. "The kind Lord has given the commandment that none shall from now onwards dominate over others nor cause tyranny. And all would abide in peace and happiness. Thus shall be realised on earth a new polity of tolerance and compassion."[3] Guru Nanak infused courage and moral strength among people by upholding divine law of justice in the form of a just political order. He also sanctioned withdrawal of divine mandate from those rulers who failed to perform their ordained duties and indulged in tyranny.

A review of Guru Nanak's contribution in the broad perspective and totality of medieval Bhakti movement brings out the distinctive quality of Guru Nanak's message in the context of his times as also the originality of his response. Nanak's indebtedness to the Nirguna Sant tradition cannot be denied. Guru Nanak authentically belonged to the tradition of the saints initiated by Kabir and the fundamental components of the latter's ideology are seen to provide the root and dynamic force for Nanak's message. The acceptance of the compositions of earlier saints in the Sikh scripture i.e., *Adi Granth* shows that Nanak had captured the substantive part of Sant tradition and wanted its preservation among his followers. Guru Nanak's vision had pierced through the apparent differences of the various Nirguna sects of his times and had brought out their inherent oneness of ideas and ideals. The same lies embellished in the *Guru Granth*, irrespective of the source from which it came. This principle is a practical demonstration of ideal enunciated in the *Granth*, "O Lord! show thy mercy, save the world which is in agony. Lift it upto thee, no matter from which path thou raises it."[4] All the saints whose teachings are incorporated in the *Adi Granth* shun religious bigotry, ritualism; there is uniformity of belief in the worship of Nirguna God and in the equality of all men without any distinction of caste or creed. No wonder teachings of Muslim saints like Farid and Bikhan too were picked up because of the universal humanitarian aspect of their message that did not confine to narrow limits of Muslim orthodoxy. The sincere devotional

[1]*Adi Granth*, Mul Mantra, p. 1.
[2]Ibid., p. 1427.
[3]Ibid., Sri Rag, p. 78.
[4]Ibid., Rag Bilawal, p. 853.

compositions of Farid are also the essence of the central message of Sikh faith. To the *Adi Granth* all the followers of Sikhism are made to show respect—not only to Sikh Gurus but to Kabir, Namdev, Raidas, Farid and others—and this amounts to showing respect for the essence and substantive part of religious tradition that existed before Nanak. It was a wonderful phenomenon by which Guru Nanak brought the essence of his socio-religious milieu within the orbit of his thought.

If we carefully examine and summarise the work done by Nirguna saints we notice that they were content to communicate their ideas to the people but in terms of outright rejection or drastic alteration of Hindu socio-religious structure, the social impact of their movements was very little. While we do find numerous adjustments and shift of emphasis within the existing social order, there are no conspicuous socio-political upheavals traceable to the *bhaktas*. The innovative mood and radical content of their message lost its intensity and the community of followers, i.e., *panths* that coalesced around in the name of some of the saints accommodated themselves within the fold of Hindu social order. What distinguishes Guru Nanak from other *bhaktas* is his practical social vision backed by positive action. While Kabir's message continues to remain a part of the Nirguna Sant tradition, Nanak was able to give shape to a distinct phenomenon which came to be known as Sikhism. Whereas it is the mystic detachment which stands out in Kabir, Nanak's message had an element of optimism. Retaining the mystic-metaphysical part of the Nirguna Sant tradition, Nanak brought about a qualitative change in the teachings of Kabir and gave it a broader base. He was more constructive and practical and this explains why Sikhism as a religion could strike deep roots. Although all the Nirguna *bhaktas* show a deep insight into what was corroding the Hindu society, yet Guru Nanak stands amongst them as one who was equally concerned with the active correcting of what he found to be wrong. He was imbued with a strong sense of social commitment and achieved great success in the task he had undertaken. Delegitimizing and desacralizing of traditional Hindu socio-religious system seems to have been the most fundamental impact of Nanak's Bhakti movement upon the Hindu society. How substantial or ephemeral were the changes brought about by Guru Nanak's movement we may consider in a later chapter. From the time of Nanak, the Sikhs have dispensed with Hindu mythology, scriptures and rejected the Varnashrama-dharma and organized themselves into a community explicitly setting itself outside the Hindu social structure.

In short, in the Punjab, Bhakti movement found its leader in Guru Nanak. Amongst the *bhaktas,* only he consolidated the Nirguna heritage of 'dissent and protest' into a coherent system and contemplated the reconstruction of a new social order. This was made possible because

not only his movement had been more radically egalitarian but he also provided rudiments of a distinct social system through the creation of *sangat, langar* and nomination of a successor, the institutions that provided continuity as also a separate identity to his message and the movement. Awareness of and reaction to the prevailing political situations in the Punjab was also not outside the purview of his social concern and commitment. If any thing, his political awareness was a by-product and an extension of his social philosophy. Nowhere else in the contemporary *bhakti* literature, the issues of socio-political evils are comprehended with such urgency and need for change as in the *Adi Granth*, Guru Nanak's genius lay in integrating the contemporary *bhakti*—Sufi tradition of spiritual quest with the socio-political milieu in the totality of medieval Indian life. To that extent one may reasonably conclude that while Nanak resembled the earlier *bhaktas* in revitalizing religion and society, he was alone in creating a distinct socio-religious ethos which it still retains a great deal of its vitality and dynamism. Again it was he who provided socio-political dimensions to the medieval Bhakti movement by converting it into a self-sufficient code of temporal and spiritual obligations. His successors fortified his message to avoid compromise with the forces of Hindu orthodoxy.

4

Social Message of Guru Nanak and Contemporary Society

The birth and growth of the Sikh community represents a remarkable socio-political phenomenon evoking considerable interest among historians pursuing studies in religion and social change. The rise of Sikhism can neither be taken merely as a religious phenomenon nor can it be regarded as a political movement aimed at overthrowing the Muslim rule and establishment of a state independent of the working power structure. It is, however, to be noted that the birth of Sikhism took place in the background of a deep-seated social ferment which found its germinal expression in the utterances and underlying message of Guru Nanak. While philosophers and religious reformers for centuries have searched for spiritual co-relatives in life and provided explanations for tensions at personal and social level, the remarkable comprehension of Guru Nanak's metaphysical and philosophical interpretations, his incisive and bold observations on and reactions to the socio-political milieu mark him out as a unique personality among the medieval Bhakti saints. Though essentially the prophet of a new faith, he saw much beyond religious and intellectual cognitions, and aimed at arousing the conscience of man in society and polity as well. His verses do embody a fundamental vision and consciousness of the divine and the sacred. But at the same time, they reveal a serious concern with the existential necessities. They represent Nanak's spiritual aspirations as well as his struggle for humanism with a strong sense of social commitment.

The social dimensions of Nanak's faith and the radical nature of his message have not received so far the requisite attention from the scholars, leave alone full justice. His concern for social situation is perceived to be much less important than his religion. The *banis* of Guru Nanak have been studied by McLeod to give a lucid and cogent exposition of his theology and by Professor Grewal to understand Nanak's responses to historical situations. According to McLeod,

"Political, social and economic issues find expression in his works only in so far as they relate to the pattern of religious salvation which he upheld or to the contemporary patterns which he rejected."[1] Likewise, Professor Grewal has suggested that though the range of his (Nanak's) experience of contemporary society is comprehensive, only a part of his experience is reflected as reaction to social milieu.[2] Indubhushan Banerjee while discussing Guru Nanak's attitude towards the existing social order concludes that there is no satisfactory evidence to support the view that Guru Nanak's aim was to build an entirely new structure on the ruins of the old.[3] In fact, many other scholars and experts too regard Nanak as essentially a religious man dedicated to spiritual quest. Such an approach tends to put an embargo on a full comprehension of Nanak's radical social message which is characterized by a sense of strong mission to make fresh beginnings. Besides, it is not through metaphysical utterances or mere social comment, but through the structural and organizational efforts of Guru Nanak that there emerged a new community which, while being an integral part of Indian community, was a distinct and definitely identifiable one. Also the social consciousness inculcated among his followers was conspicuous and distinguished by its nature from that of the followers of the other medieval *bhaktas* that preceded Nanak.

Since Guru Nanak's observations of social import were related to the contemporary socio-political situations, it would be relevant to analyse briefly the contemporary society to appreciate the extent and nature of his social mission. The ethics of a race and its social aspirations spring primarily from the grass-roots of the existing culture and socio-religious order. The main focus of study of social history has remained on descriptive aspects like food, dress, fairs and festivals etc. and not with the contemporary state of affairs of the people at large. This approach to history resulted in proliferation of many books on medieval Indian society. There is a general assumption that religious literature is useful primarily, if not exclusively, for religious history. Recently there has been a growing emphasis on utilizing religious texts as a source of studying social history in a particular perspective.[4] A close study of medieval *bhakti* literature and contemporary Persian works will yield fruitful results not only about the social life and conditions of the non-Muslims but also the reactions of the saints to the Muslim rule and authoritarianism of privileged hierarchy responsible for continued suppression of people. The medieval *bhaktas*, particularly the Nirguna

[1]W.H. McLeod, op. cit., pp. 162-63.
[2]J.S. Grewal, op. cit., p. 194.
[3]Indubhushan Banerjee, *Evolution of Khalsa*, vol. I, p. 141.
[4]Savitri Chandra, op. cit.

saints, were sensitive to the social exploitation by the Brahminical order and were critical of the contemporary society, and Kabir particularly applied his sharp critical faculty to castigate the corrupt and grossly worldly groups of society both among the Hindus and the Muslims.

The most significant among the medieval religious saints endowed with a distinct social outlook, was Guru Nanak. Taking full cognizance of the social situations he embarked upon a new religious reformation of society by suggesting remedial measures which had in them the seeds of a new social order. There were two major social segments in Guru Nanak's times viz. the Hindus and Muslims. That the Muslims did not form a homogeneous group has been pointed out in a number of works by both Indian and Pakistani scholars.[1] The intra-community distinctions were both demographical and socio-economic. Whereas the immigrant Muslims settled in the cities and towns, pockets of Muslim population in the countryside were formed by native converts to Islam during medieval ages.[2] Secondly, the Muslim society in Punjab, as in other parts of India, was marked by sectarian divisions and open condemnation of Shias etc. by the Sunnis during the Sultanate period. It is important to observe that some sort of social exclusiveness, parallel to that of Hindus, also existed among the Muslims. The nobility and elite enjoyed greater economic advantage and jealously guarded their political and social privileges. The *ulama* and other religious dignitaries too, enjoyed a high social status. Larger in number than the nobles and religious dignitaries were the peasants, soldiers, traders and small officials, who were economically less prosperous and enjoyed a lesser status. The craftsmen, servants and slaves formed the lowest class of Muslims. The respectable groups among the Muslims lived apart from the common populace and in fact the segregation of social groups was a reflection of the consciousness of social differences.[3] In Punjab, as elsewhere, there were several gradations among the Muslims and this was so in spite of complete theoretical equality in Islam. Evidently the Muslim doctrine of brotherhood did not have as much appeal as might have been expected, perhaps on account of the glaring social and racial disparities rampant in the Muslim society.

The most dominant feature of the Hindu society in Punjab, as in other parts, was the caste system. Since Guru Nanak repudiated the

[1]A. Karim, *Changing Society in India and Pakistan.* A Study in Social Change and Stratification; K.A. Nizami, *Studies in Medieval Indian History*; I.H. Qureshi, *Muslim Community of India and Pakistan Subcontinent*; S.M. Ikram, *Muslim Civilization in India*; M. Mujeeb, *Indian Muslims.*

[2]S. Nurul Hasan, Presidential Address, Medieval India Section, Punjab History Congress, Patiala, 1966, p. 74.

[3]The so-called socio-economic equality was more or less effective only within a limited range and not within the Muslim society as a whole.

caste ideology and the social system based upon it, it is necessary to give an idea of the caste milieu in which Nanak's faith was born and the character and strength of the social reaction it was up against.

From the earliest times, the concept of caste system or Varnashrama-dharma, (four-fold division of society into Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra) entailing separate and different duties for the different castes, constituted the basis of Hindu society. The concept of Varnashrama-dharma was treated almost as axiomatic and the Hindu socio-religious system upheld its validity. The Hindu caste system sustained the economic and social apartheid amongst different *jati* groups. The lawgiver Manu warned that if this social and economic apartheid was not respected, and when "one *jati* group interlopes into the economic reserves and duties and obligations of the other, it is then that the *dharma* is said to be polluted" (*Dharmsya galani bhavati*).[1]

In fact, initially the conception of four castes involved the ideal of an integrated society by organizing people on certain vocational grounds and each class was regarded as an integral part of the fabric of the society. Gradually, however, the essential features of the so-called caste system led to social inequalities based on birth and prohibitions in regard to marriage and inter-dining. Pannikar regards the rigidity of caste as a social crystallization.[2] While it is obvious that caste is a sociological fact and not a religious institution, it is none the less true that it had the sanction of Hindu tradition and evidence of it is found as early as the *Rigveda* where caste is regarded as a permanent feature of society. The concept of caste was upheld throughout medieval times. Alberuni[3] had noticed the specific duties of four castes, though it is highly improbable that the classified duties corresponded to all the professions followed by different social groups. Notwithstanding the insistence of orthodox Brahminical order to preserve and support the status quo of caste as the ideal social norm, the possibility of absorption, upgrading or downgrading of social groups within the framework of the caste had always been there.[4] A factor of the highest sociological importance that constituted the crying evil of caste in medieval Punjab (as elsewhere in North India) was the fact that each caste stood divided into numerous sub-castes. Each one of these was further divided into numerous social groups, converting the Hindu society into a mass of small units, neutralizing social cohesion and

[1]See *Manavadharma Shastra*, p. 187.

[2]K.M. Pannikar, *Hindu Society at Crossroads*, p. 15.

[3]*Alberuni's India*, tr. Edward Sachau, p. 100.

[4]For social change with respect to caste see V. Upadhyaya, *The Socio-Religious Conditions of North India*, AD 700-1200, p. 365. The socio-economic position of certain social groups did not always correspond to their position in the caste order.

encouraging divisiveness. Social cohesiveness was rendered difficult further on account of the caste-habit restrictions on food and inter-caste marriage. The menial services i.e. professions which were said to pollute or degrade, were performed by the untouchables. Theoretically, the untouchables fell outside the caste system and were not members of any of the four *varnas*. Consequently, a social group, segregated and confined to menial works, existed as a separate social entity. The position of the untouchables was in many ways worse than that of the slaves.[1] No personal or social considerations were permitted to modify the rigours of untouchability.[2] Inter-dining with the untouchables was strictly prohibited. In some ways, the Brahmins treated the untouchables in a manner in which no man should treat another. No basic Hindu scripture sanctions an outrageous treatment of the untouchables who were always the worst victims of social injustice based on caste inequality. *Bhagavadgita* categorically states that:

> "Not the accident of high birth, not strict observance of rules pertaining to the duties of social grade but the inner psychological attitude of devotion for God, is alone capable of conferring emancipation upon the individual."[3]

Even *Mahabharata* states that moral excellence of an individual is not to be judged with reference to his caste status or occupation. Thus, "Truthfulness, charity, forgiveness, ethical conduct, self-control and mercy, where these are, he is a Brahmin. . . . The presence of aforementioned virtues makes one a Brahmin and their absence a Shudra."[4] The high metaphysics of the Upanishads and ethics of the *Gita* had been reduced to mere words by the tyranny of the caste in medieval times.[5]

The Brahmin theorists justified the establishment of a society based on the principle of segregation and exclusiveness. The socio-religious order based on caste was supported and buttressed by the Rajput

[1]Personal relations and socio-economic considerations quite often modified the rigours of personal slavery. They did not hold good in the case of untouchability which seemed to be a sort of communal slavery.

[2]A strange and important thing was that the sub-castes and untouchables too had a caste organization of their own. There were infinite gradations. The untouchables society was in fact an imitation of Hindu life in all its weaknesses, often enforcing social distinctions as rigid as among the four castes and consequently as broken and divided as the other.

[3]*Bhagavadgita*, XVIII, 46.

[4]*Mahabharata*, XXX, 21, 25.

[5]It may be important to take note of what Swami Vivekanand wrote in modern times, "The Hindus may get greater credit for arriving at Advaitism earlier than the other races, they being an older race than the Hebrew or the Arab, yet practical Advaitism which looks upon and behaves towards all mankind as one's own soul is yet to be developed among the Hindus." A letter to a Muslim friend dated January 10, 1898, quoted in *The Tribune*, 16.9.1953.

ruling dynasties. The dominating feature of north Indian life during the eleventh and twelfth centuries had been the rise of the Rajput ruling dynasties and the alienation of lands to Brahmins in large numbers for they had been legitimizers of Rajput political power. The Rajput-Brahmin alliance had dominated the scene in North India before the advent of Islam and was responsible for the maintenance of the existing socio-cultural order based on Varnashrama order.[1] The downfall of the Rajput kingdoms and the establishment of Muslim rule led to a considerable change in the legal and formal powers of the Brahmins. Though they lost their royal patronage, the Brahmins managed to strengthen their hold on society by informal authority and personal influence through the instrument of caste system. The overthrow of Hindu rule in the Gangetic valley led to a great increase in the social prestige of the Brahmins. The Kshatriya ruling power was broken. The consequent leadership of the Brahmins in society led to an extreme religious reaction. Caste became more rigid and social customs without the directing hand of the state usurped the authority of the religion. Since the Muslim concept of the state did not involve social legislation as one of its major functions, the Muslim rulers did not express any desire to interfere with the Hindu social organization based on caste and allowed brahminical orthodoxy to prevail in all matters pertaining to the Hindu way of life. While it cannot be denied that the arrival and establishment of Muslim rule led to an increased influence of the Brahmins in Hindu social set up, it would be wrong to conclude that the advent of Islam led only to the growth of reaction and crystallization of orthodoxy as a defence mechanism amongst the Hindus.[2] In fact, even before the Turkish conquest of North India, the Brahmins had been advocating greater and greater exclusiveness for the high castes, their reactionary attitude was responsible for the perpetuation of social fragmentation and divisiveness.

Thus one of the most important force governing Hindu social life during the age of Nanak was the caste ideology which served mainly the interests of the upper castes. The social aims of such a society were reactionary and thwarted the growth of any just social ethics, much less humanistic values. The influence of the caste system coupled with reactionary and orthodox attitude of the Brahmins, created conditions for the growth of anarchist social institutions. Even the most undesirable

[1]Satish Chandra, "Historical Background to the Rise of Bhakti Movement in North India", opening chapter in Savitri Chandra's *Social Life and Concept in Medieval Hindi Bhakti Poetry,* p. 6.

[2]There is little evidence to show that during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Hindu caste ridden society was in any imminent danger of subversion due to the appeal of Islamic values of social equality.

social customs arrogated to themselves, (through pseudo sacred writings) the sanctity of divine ordinances.[1]

There is enough evidence in the *Adi Granth* to show that Guru Nanak was deeply aware of the existence of the social decadence as also the tyranny and injustice arising from the caste-prejudices and taboos. Accounts of the incidents of his life in the *Janam Sakhis* indicate the same. Guru Nanak drew repeated attention to the decadence of Hindu society and to the evils of Hindu orthodoxy which had ceased to concern itself with the internal core or values of the Hindu tradition. He was very sensitive to the oppressive and discriminatory attitude of the Brahmins. He speaks disdainfully of those Brahmins who lacked all dignity, grace[2] and had become corrupt[3] and immoralized. According to Nanak, the Brahmins had abandoned the intrinsic virtues for which they were supposed to stand and had fallen a prey to all the vices which they were expected to combat in the community.[4] They had failed to perform their ordained obligations and had debased themselves beyond any hope of redemption.[5] The continued prestige and socio-religious influence of the Brahmins was marked and the force of tradition and superstition quite strong. Guru Nanak was also watchful of the increased commensal and caste-taboos, the increasing rigour of the caste system, and the unbridled exploitation of the masses by the Brahmins in the name of religion. Brahmins intensified social disharmony by promoting discussions and controversy rather than help in its mitigation.[6] Hindu society was torn by strife, castes were set against castes and sects against sects.[7] The tyranny of the Brahmins did not express itself in the use of sword. But they had adopted the dangerous weapon, that of social exclusion, contempt and hatred for the lower castes.[8] Methods which Kant[9] in his ethics and Rousseau[10] in his politics would have considered objectionable and lowly were adopted by the Brahmin to maintain their supremacy over the masses. Guru Nanak stood firmly against the authoritarian attitude of the Brahmins

[1]*Sati*, child-marriage and licentious practices of the Tantrics in different parts of Punjab met with no social anathema, rather the orthodoxy regarded such social practices as sanctioned by religion. It was one's duty not to interfere with them.

[2]*Adi Granth*, Rag Ramkali, p. 951.

[3]Ibid., Rag Dhanasari p. 662.

[4]Ibid., Rag Gauri, p. 141.

[5]Ibid., Rag Asa, p. 477.

[6]Bhai Gurdas, *Var,* 1, Pauri 20.

[7]Ibid., Pauris 17, 18, 19.

[8]*Adi Granth*, Var Asa, p. 417.

[9]Cf. Kant, "So act as to treat humanity whether in thy own image or that of any other", *Kant's Theory of Ethics,* tr. T.K. Abbot.

[10]Rousseau, "To renounce liberty is to renounce the quality of manhood and right of humanity and the duties", *The Social Contract*, tr. M. Rose, p. 78.

in Hindu society, which had made it impossible for the individual to think and act freely.

A study of Guru Nanak's compositions reveals that he was also aware of the moral degeneration and the corrupt practices of Khatris of Punjab. As the Muslim political and military authorities consolidated their position it was felt that they could not run the administration of the country without the help and co-operation from the Hindus. Such help and co-operation were not readily available from the Brahmins. It were the Khatris who showed a considerable adaptability in adjusting to Muslim rule and looked towards enjoying political patronage of the ruling authorities. With the advent of Muslim rule the Khatris had lost their political power. However, their importance in the civil administration of the Lodhis is noted by Ganesh Das who refers to some important positions held by Persian knowing Khatris.[1] By joining the administrative apparatus as petty revenue officials, the Khatris also became instrumental in the economic exploitation of the producing classes i.e. the peasantry. The exploitative role of the Khatris was dual; one as collaborators of the ruling class in their capacity as revenue officials and second by way of their profession in money lending.[2] Several occupations and professions of the Khatris also find mention in Guru Nanak's compositions. Those who figure in them are the *Sahukar*, the money-lender, the merchant, the trader, the *saraf*, the goldsmith etc. Though the Khatris had come to play a significant role in trade and shop keeping, there appeared to be little in their behaviour that was commendable.[3] Guru Nanak brings out quite graphically the plight of Khatris most of whom had come to adopt deceit and duplicity for sheer survival.[4] It is important to note that Guru Nanak's condemnation of Brahmins is in terms of their social arrogance which led to high handedness and exploitation of lower castes. In case of the Khatris, Guru Nanak is more critical of the decadence in their social and professional ethics and regretted that their behaviour was marked by moral and spiritual depravity, shorn of all dignity. The shame of collecting levies and taxes from their co-religionists for visiting temples, keeping cows and honouring the Brahmins, seeking redemption through acts of ritualistic piety marked by an empty formalism, divorced from

[1]Ganesh Das, *Char-Bagh-i-Punjab*, pp. 291-92.

[2]The ordinary percentage of interest on loans being ten to twenty per cent, they were likely to make good profits (K.M. Ashraf, op. cit., p. 218).

[3]Guru Nanak found that the Khatris had become so very slavish in their ways of life that they had yielded to Mohammedan way of life and pleased their masters by adopting Muslim names and eating meat prepared in Muslim fashion. *Adi Granth*, Rag Asa, pp. 470-71.

[4]These references are found in the *Adi Granth* in Rag Gauri, Rag Malar, Rag Dhanasari and Rag Asa.

any spiritual content, and finally the discharge of their (Khatris') role as collaborators of the new masters even in the matter of serving them for implementation of coercive measures against their co-religionists—all this is brought out forcefully by Guru Nanak.[1]

Medieval Indian economy was basically rural agricultural and Punjab was an integral part of that economy. The Hindu society in rural Punjab was marked by the preponderance of Jats, who, by and large, constituted a dominant agricultural group. A majority of them were peasant proprietors. The superior hereditary rights in the rural society were also held by the Jats; they had their Zamindars, Chaudharis and Muquaddams. This section of the Jats by virtue of their superior rights in land and because of their role in the village society, also constituted the rural aristocracy that subsisted on the appropriation of surplus generated by the primary producers, i.e. the peasants. The horizontal division of medieval Hindu society on the basis of caste and its vertical division based on the mode of production which accorded higher social and political status to those who controlled land and its surplus produce led to the creation of two distinct and incompatible dominant social groups, i.e. the high castes, particularly the Brahmins and the rural elites in the Punjab which in majority of cases happened to be the Jats. It would appear that political and economic powers including control over land were important factors for a group rising in *varna* scale. However, the Jats though they were in a sound economic position, yet they were accorded a lower social status in Hindu caste order. The ambiguous division of the society which adopted different criteria for social recognition and contained elements of traditional value system based on caste superiority as well as feudal values as determinant of one's status in society was bound to create tensions in the society. There was a desire for upward social mobility and the Jats often resented the dominance and exploitation of the higher castes in matters of social life and religion. It was thus inevitable that Jats should protest against social discrimination which had no material basis and Guru Nanak's egalitarian movement provided the strongest forum of such protest. Apart from the Jats, there were a large number of Hindu craftsmen and numerous occupational groups all of whom suffered from social disabilities due to the existing Varanashrama-dharma supported and upheld by Brahminical orthodoxy.

In short, the social milieu that necessitated the commissioning of Guru Nanak's lofty mission represented a desperate social scene.[1] The evils, according to Nanak, were the outcome of human apathy and the people's lack of social commitment. A study of Guru Nanak's utterances reveals the passions of a man highly sensitive to the wrongs he saw

[1]*Adi Granth*, Rag Asa, pp. 471-72, 476-77.

around himself. In a number of incisive references he invited repeated attention to the element of decadence which is a mark of any tradition that does not admit of the necessity of preserving and strengthening the inner core of values against the coercive influence of social evils. He was perhaps convinced that social institutions through which religion works had ceased to provide for self-preservation, continued examination and reconstruction. In fact, a change was needed, a change which would not be of the kind that justified things as they were but of the kind that would pull down the tyrant from the seat and raise up the humble and the weak.

Guru Nanak was to usher in one such social change. The significance of his new social vision lay in the acceptance of all facets of life—moral, religious, social or political—as diverse revelations of the divine immanence.[2] Religion is concerned with something more than personal salvation. It is the sanction of social duties and spiritual manifestation of corporate life of a community.[3] Guru Nanak aimed at providing a religious rationalization for social change. He advocated a new social order. He could be satisfied with mere verbal expressions of discontent, but was a strong man of action whose teachings were shaped by his realization of the urgency for social change. In that sense, his religion had a radical social dimension. He struck at the root of the social system and provided do's and don'ts for his followers whom he wanted to adopt a different socio-religious system.

The break away from the caste system was the most fundamental departure that Guru Nanak made from the established social order of the Hindu Varnashrama-dharma. It was rejection of the caste which precisely and conspicuously later divided those who followed Hinduism and those who became Sikhs. The Sikh faith as preached by Nanak is definitely at variance with the social facets of Hindu caste structure and visualizes a social order that knows no racial or social inequalities or caste taboos. According to Gough, "the theory and practice of hereditary social distinctions carried to the extreme limits and confirmed by the sanction of religion is a barrier to all progress since in effect it becomes an enormous system of privileges."[4] Nanak refused to follow the caste hierarchy of the Hindu social order. He was disturbed over the fissiparous tendencies of the caste system that had led only to the gradual disintegration of the Hindu society. He was convinced that no spiritual and social progress could take place in a system of privileges which confirmed the monopoly of the higher castes. He reacted to the

[1]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 1, Pauris 17-18, 19-21.
[2]*Adi Granth,* Rag Sorathi, p. 671.
[3]R.H. Tawney, *Religion and Growth*, p. 17.
[4]Charles Gough, *The Sikh Wars*, p. 16.

exploitation of the so-called lower castes. For Nanak, all men were equal before God, there is no low, no privileged, no outcaste, all were equal both in race and creed, in rights and aspirations.[1] In the prevailing Indian situation this precept of equality was of great revolutionary import. Guru Nanak emphatically declared that the existing institutions of class degradation and untouchability were indefensible and against the will of God. He had no regard for the iniquitous caste system and the idea that all mankind was God's creation occurs several times in his compositions. For instance, he says,

> *"Sabh meh jot jot hai soi,*
> *tis dai chanan sabh men chanan hoi."*[2]
> (The light of God shines equally in all.)

Guru Nanak firmly believed that since God was the creator of all men, all human beings were equally entitled to religious quest and salvation. He says:

> Useless is the pride of caste
> Useless is the pride of glory.
> The Lord alone gives protection to all.[3]

While castigating the caste he says "What merit does caste system possess? God does not care for our caste or birth. As are one's deeds so one's caste."[4]

> He who forgets the Master is of low caste;
> Without his name one remains an outcaste.[5]

Since high castes were not easily prepared to concede the spiritual merit of a low caste, Guru Nanak insisted that it is for God to bestow greatness irrespective of one's caste.[6] Indeed God made all men and His light shines in all. Call everyone high, there is none low (*nich*).[7] Guru Nanak had a good deal of appreciation for those who managed to rise above the caste distinctions. Only very few, however, succeeded in transcending the notions of *jati-varna*. But it is they that can pass as true coins.[8] Guru Nanak was particularly pained by the inhumanity of

[1]Fredrick Pincott, *The Sikh Religion*, a Symposium in Calcutta, 1950, p. 74.
[2]*Adi Granth*, Rag Dhanasari, p. 663.
[3]Ibid., Sri Rag, p. 83.
[4]Ibid., Rag Prabhati, p. 1330.
[5]Ibid., Rag Asa, p. 349.
[6]Ibid., Rag Basant, p. 1188; Sri Rag, p. 53.
[7]Ibid., Sri Rag, p. 62. *'Sabh ko uccha akhiyai nicha na disai koi.'*
[8]Ibid., Rag Prabhati, p. 1345.

assigning millions of untouchables to a miserable existence. His sympathy with the lower caste groups is well established and indeed the lowly are the possible recipients of grace and Guru Nanak associated himself with them.[1] The followers of Nanak had nothing to fall back upon except their 'inner resources' and effective belief in God. Accepted by God he does not have to bow to others.[2] There are numerous pronouncements where Nanak repudiated the validity of caste and vehemently reacted against arrogance and high handedness of the Brahmins who were considered holy *ipso facto*, but immune from consequences of exploitation to which the lower castes were subjected. Guru Nanak was, beyond all doubt, a vigorous and practical denunciator of caste. He repudiated not only the supposed primeval and divine origin of the institution of caste but also its ethical validity. Theoretically the utterances of Guru Nanak (notably the stress upon there being no caste in the next world) may seem to suggest a continuation of earlier attempts at social reform, that only levelled caste in the kingdom of God. However, it is not metaphysical utterances but the practical steps taken by Guru Nanak for the denunciation of the caste, that constitute the *summum bonum* of his social message and role. He provided the framework for a vigorous egalitarian society. His insistence on equality was far from being a pious myth.

The significant degree to which the Sikh *panth* succeeded in eliminating the discriminatory aspect of caste in social life can in fact be better comprehended by comparing Guru Nanak's attempts with those of monotheist saints like Kabir, Dadu and Ravidas. The hymns where the monotheist saints directly repudiated the validity of the caste and their message had far reaching social implications because their social philosophy and attitude of 'dissent and protest' cut across the sectarian and hierarchical social values of the sanctified caste order. There is no doubt that some of them particularly Kabir challenged the iniquitous social values and pillars on which the superstructure of the caste order rested. Significantly the real barbs of Kabir were directed against the Brahmins and their claims of superiority and their practice of untouchability and commensal taboos. He asked, "Do you have milk in your veins while we have blood in ours? If not how are you a Brahmin and we Shudra."[3] The attitude of protest against caste is echoed in the sayings of Dadu[4] and Ravidas[5] also. The vehemence with which the Nirguna saints condemned caste, makes it clear that

[1]Ibid., Sri Rag, p.15.
[2]Ibid., p. 729.
[3]Kabir, *Ramaini, pada* 42.
[4]Dadu, op. cit., 13/116, 29/21.
[5]*Adi Granth*, Ravidas Sorathi, p. 867.

these saints regarded caste as a hindrance to socio-religious progress. But since none of them attempted to organize the social message outside the Hindu caste system, their crusade at best amounted to an idealistic declaration that only aroused the expectations of millions. However, considering the nature of the Hindu society, any anti-caste movement was sooner or later bound to be engulfed by the institutionalized hide bound social system of the caste. Max Weber states, "the assimilative power of Hinduism is so great that it tends even to integrate social forms considered beyond the religious border. The religious movements of expressly anti-Brahminical and anti-caste character that is contrary to one of the fundamentals of Hinduism have, in all essentials, returned to the caste order. The process is not hard to explain. When a principled anti-caste sect recruits former members of various Hindu castes and tears them from the context of their former ritualist duties the caste responds by excommunicating all the sect's proselytes."[1] Thus the consistent history of the caste shows that there was no scope for a radical social change, much less for a social revolution, by remaining within the framework of the caste society.

What Guru Nanak did in this situation was to strike out a new path altogether. It was he alone of medieval *bhakti* saints who consciously gave a distinctive shape to his egalitarian message by setting up a social order outside the Hindu Varnashrama-dharma. The Sikh faith as preached by Nanak, "unreservedly repudiates religious sanction of birth distinctions, refuses to admit that there are any divinely ordained classes among mankind, denies that social gradations determine social ethics and civic obligations of an individual and unambiguously declares that class and caste distinctions are just as much nonsense; all men are born equal, for men were not created from different parts of the primeval man, but all originate from the same source, the light of God and therefore there are no high and low by birth."[2]

The significance of the spirit of equality and fraternity achieved by Guru Nanak can be assessed from the fact that his message attracted following from diverse castes, the high and the low, and in terms of socio-economic disparities the Sikh community was a heterogeneous one.[3] Guru Nanak's compositions and *vars* of Bhai Gurdas bear evidence to the diverse social groups constituting the early Sikhs. On the one hand there were Khatri traders, clothiers, jewellers, money exchangers while on the other peasants, artisans, craftsmen, labourers, slaves,

[1]Max Weber, *The Religions of India*, pp. 18-19.

[2]Kapur Singh, *Parasharprasana or the Baishaki of Guru Gobind Singh*, p. 428.

[3]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 14, Pauris 16, 21, 25.

lohars, telis, nais, kumhars, dhobis, chamars, chuhras, butchers and numerous others who had suffered on account of caste hierarchy.[1] For Guru Nanak the social background of his followers did not matter and he addressed himself equally to all the devotees. The community of those who owed allegiance to Nanak and constituted the nucleus of Nanakpanth were known as Sikhs, a word which in the literal sense means simply a learner or disciple. Though the individual Sikhs came from different backgrounds, in the Sikh *sangat* they acquired one colour just as the betel-leaf, areca-nut and lime produce one colour.[2] The followers of Guru Nanak found new affiliations[3] and all the four *varnas* acquired the *gotra* of Gurmukh in the *sangat.*[4] What held different members together was their intense belief in equality, loyalty to Guru Nanak and effective belief in God.[5] A true Sikh of the Guru did not bother about the distinctions of caste, and the insistence on equality attracted more members to the Sikh *panth.*

Brahmins were hardly ever drawn into the Sikh fold since the egalitarian concepts that shaped the Sikh community were bound to mitigate their superiority. Thus from the very start the influence of the Brahmins in the Sikh *panth* was eliminated and this delinking from Brahminical orthodoxy made a major contribution in eroding the validity and the sanctity of the caste system among the Sikhs. The Khatris formed the most important constituent of the Sikh *panth* and though a large Khatri following was drawn from urban based mercantile community, most of them were rural dwellers. All the ten Gurus were Khatris and among the prominent Sikhs of Guru Nanak and his successors, Bhai Gurdas refers to some of the well-known Khatri sub-castes of Punjab.[6] There is enough evidence in the *Janam Sakhis* which reflect the prominence as also substantial influence of Khatris within the Sikh community.[7]

The Jats though they were prominent numerically constituted a second important group within the Sikh *panth.* Fauja Singh suggests that the Jats joining the Sikh movement in large numbers was facilitated partly by the hold that the commercial classes of Khatris had on the

[1]Bhai Gurdas, *Vars* 8, 18, 22, 23.

[2]Ibid., 8, 4; 11, 7; 16; 13.

[3]*Adi Granth, Var,* p. 590.

[4]Bhai Gurdas, *Var,* 295.

[5]*Adi Granth*, p. 729.

[6]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 11, Pauris 13-25.
The Gurus were all Khatris. Bhai Gurdas and Meharban were Khatris.

[7]The three principal figures in the story of Lahore merchant are all Khatris. (*Janam Sakhi*, B 40 ff. 138b). Duni Chand is said to be a Khatri (*Puratan Janam Sakhi*, p. 70); it is a Khatri who converts Lehna in Khadur (*Puratan Janam Sakhi*, p. 106). Mula and Malik Bhago were also Khatris.

cultivating classes.[1] In a similar context, McLeod suggests that willingness of the Jats to join the new Sikh *panth* in large numbers was presumably facilitated by the fact that the Khatris commonly served as teachers of the Jats who could thus be expected to respond.[2] While this traditional relationship can be regarded as one of the reasons for the entry of the Jats in the Sikh *panth* in large numbers, it, however, seems inadequate by itself, as a means of explaining the apparent volume of the Jat membership. An interesting, plausible and generally accepted theory is offered by Prof. Irfan Habib—the widening disparity fortified by their inherited egalitarian tradition attracted the Jats to a line of Gurus who rejected the theory of caste and willingly raised Jats to positions of high authority in the new *panth*.[3] There seems to be little doubt that Sikhism appeared at a psychological moment and in the egalitarian message of the Sikhs, the Jats found exactly what they needed and consequently they benefited in the elevation of their social status by joining the Sikh ranks. The new social order held out to them the alluring prospects of elevation in social hierarchy. The villages of central Punjab contained a dominant concentration of Jats and during the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Jat segment of the Sikh community acquired a preponderance. The Jat allegiance to the Sikh *panth* was of considerable importance in the evolution which took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The shift from Khatri to Jat leadership had taken place by the middle of the seventeenth century and at that time Mohsin Fani, the author of *Dabistan-i Mazahib*, noted that although the Gurus had been Khatris, they had made the Khatris subservient to the Jats—thus most of the great *masnads* of Gurus were Jats.[4] It, however, is to be noted that such information should not lead to the inference that the Jats assumed an air of superiority, for what the Sikh Gurus since Guru Nanak aimed at was the levelling up of social status of all kinds and not substituting the status superiority of one class or caste by that of another. There is evidence to show that not only Khatris and Jats but large numbers of the followers were drawn from communities like barbers, leather workers and scavengers, all considered low in the Brahminical *jati* system.[5]

[1]Fauja Singh, ed., *Sikhism*, p. 13.

[2]H. McLeod, *Evolution of the Sikh Community*, p. 10.

[3]Irfan Habib, Presidential Address, *Proceedings of Punjab History Congress*, Session, 1971, pp. 15-54. Jats are said to be originally a pastoral community that had been condemned to a humiliating position in society, that of Shudras (*Alberuni's India*, tr. E. Sachau, p. 401). Gradually while there was a change to agriculture and also elevation in the economic status of the Jats, the social stigma, however, persisted.

[4]Mohsin Fani, *Dabistan-i Mazahib*, p. 286.

[5]Bhai Gurdas, *Vars* 8, 12, 22, 23.

Guru Nanak had set up a social order where low castes fraternized without any discrimination with other members drawn from Khatris, Jats and the artisan classes. Thus Guru Nanak had conceived the community of his disciples as forming a casteless society. By and large, the expanding community of the Sikhs and the Sikh Gurus remained committed to this ideology.

Here it would be of interest to take note of the views of some scholars who have perceived a basic shortcoming in Guru Nanak's handling of the caste system in so far as he did not approach the problem from an economic angle. Indubhushan Banerjee discussed Nanak's attitude to the existing Hindu caste system and very confidently concluded that there was no solid ground to contend that Guru Nanak had aimed at abolition of the caste system.[1] Likewise, Dr. J.S. Grewal says that in theory he appears to discard the Varnashrama order, he sees no use in caste but he does not appear to conceive of equality in any social or economic terms.[2] According to Prof. Niharranjan Ray, the ten Gurus did not enunciate any change in the productive system of the social organization but accepted and adopted the same productive system as that of the Brahminical *jati* system in which the socio-religious and socio-economic order of the production organisation were closely interwoven. Once the Sikh society fell into the same production organization, they were also obliged to accept the inexorable operation of the Hindu Brahminical *jati* hierarchy.[3]

Economic factors admittedly create social distinctions and there is an element of truth in what has been said by Niharranjan Ray. However, one cannot ignore the equally valid social rigours which prevailed and strengthened the tentacles of the caste itself during the medieval period. It were the taboos of the caste that had led to the perpetuation of untouchability, the greatest social evil. Brahmins, for example, did not enter into agriculture and production in a big way (though they enjoyed land grants), still they were the ones who insisted on enforcing the rigidity of *varna* order. Economic factors alone do not explain either the hereditary basis of the caste or exploitation arising out of it. Caste is much more than a mere economic differentiation and indicates a social status. In any case this was so in medieval India. Moreover, even if there were no antagonism of economic interest, a profound estrangement usually existed between the castes, precisely because castes were oriented towards social rank.[4] Thus caste persisted even among groups between which there were no economic disparities at

[1]Indubhushan Banerjee, op. cit., p. 121.
[2]J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*.
[3]Niharranjan Ray, op. cit., p. 22.
[4]Max Weber, op. cit., p. 38.

all. It is important to note that Nanak spoke mainly in terms of social justice which was denied to many on account of the caste system. The ethical code laid by him enjoined upon every member of the Sikh community, both individually and collectively, not to make any distinction between one *jati* and another and to have particular regard for the downtrodden. Since it was one of the main social goals of Guru Nanak to set up the Sikh *panth* as a casteless order, people from all castes unhesitatingly flocked to his *panth.*

In short, there is no conception of *varnas* in the Sikh scripture and the process of liquidation of the caste started by Guru Nanak reached its culmination under Guru Gobind Singh when a completely casteless social order was established in the form of Khalsa. There is nothing in the *banis* of the Gurus, which can be invoked against intercaste marriage or for that matter against any application of the idea of equality. Thus the idea of equality is there but like any other idea it has to find its practical expression. Since the overall social situation in the country remained as it was, a few pernicious elements of the caste system reappeared subsequently in the Sikh *panth* particularly in view of the fact that the social background of those who became Sikhs or were born Sikhs, was not necessarily discarded in totality. The occupation of a person did not change upon his joining the Sikh *panth* and his economic means did not necessarily change. There was no injunction against following the old patterns of matrimonial relations and no need was felt to change them. Therefore a horizontal link continued between the Sikh coming from particular castes and occupation groups. It is this context which explains the caste considerations that still exist and govern the matrimonial and other social relations among the Sikhs. The Sikh Gurus had discarded the system of *jati*, yet the Sikh society is not free from the social strains arising from distinctions of several groups within its ranks like Jats, Khatris, Aroras, etc. The achievements of a social movement, in any case, cannot be judged by an absolute criterion because no social movement, howsoever radical it may be, can defy its environmental limitations for a long time. The prevailing social situation in which a religious society originates has to be taken into account to judge the intensity of its revolutionary impact. From that standpoint it may be reasonably conceded that none of the medieval *bhakti* saints was able to create a dent in the citadel of caste and achieve corrective results as Guru Nanak did. The Sikh Gurus rejected explicitly the Varnashrama-dharma as also much of the consciousness of purity and pollution that is implicated in Varnashrama-dharma. One cannot ignore the significant degree to which the Sikh *panth* succeeded in eliminating many discriminatory aspects of the caste. The Sikh movement had been more radically egalitarian and Guru Nanak did organize his followers into a community explicitly outside the Hindu caste order.

A balanced assessment of Guru Nanak's social role can be made if we take special note of the organizational aspects of the religion he founded. Guru Nanak was one of the practical activists of his times for whom mere preaching without practice carried no weight. He gave a socially institutionalized form to his teachings and carefully worked out ways and means to achieve his purpose. He tried to build up the Sikh community on altogether different and new lines. For evolving the Sikh community as a casteless society, Nanak used two chief modes i.e., *sangat* and *langar*, both of which have been operating in the Sikh *panth* ever since its inception.

The idea of *sangat* had its origin in Sadh *sangat* (holy assemblage of the Sikhs). Guru Nanak explained Sadh *sangat* as the assembly where name of God is repeated.[1] The Guru remarked, "the advantages of assembling together I cannot enumerate."[2] Guru Arjan described *sangat* as "an orchard containing thickly grown trees bearing the fruit of *Nam*."[3] Bhai Gurdas felt that of all the associations, the most fruitful was with the Guru's Sikhs who were the holiest of holy.[4] He was so impressed with the piety and virtues of the Sikhs of his days that he saw in their congregation, *sangat*, an image of Heaven, the abode of all truth.[5]

One of the main teachings of Guru Nanak to all those who had faith in him was to form *sangats*. Every disciplined follower of Guru was to be a member of this assemblage where all met in a spirit of goodwill and understanding and prayed to Almighty to grant them the gift of 'Name'. The membership of *sangat* was open to all men and women, high and low, rich and poor, all flocked to *sangat*, without any distinctions of caste or creed. It was in the *sangats* that "the disciples of Guru Nanak learnt to practise Sikhism, shook off their old prejudices and rubbed off their angularities. Coming from amongst the Hindus, they completely ignored the social and religious distinctions of the Brahminical faith to which they no longer prescribed."[6]

Thus it was the creative aspect of Nanak's social mission in setting up the *sangats* that had practical results and the revolutionary factor of Sikhism is contained in its institutions as a religion and, in its social role, it offered solace to many. Guru Nanak in fact conceived the well being of man in a social set up and as such he felt the necessity of a

[1]*Adi Granth*, Sri Rag, p. 72.
[2]Ibid., p. 886.
[3]Ibid., Rag Asa, p. 385.
[4]Bhai Gurdas, *Kabit*, p. 57.
[5]Ibid., pp. 124-25.
[6]Ganda Singh, "The Impact of Guru Nanak's teachings on the lives of his followers", *Punjab, Past and Present*, April 1977, p. 41.

favourable social institution which should work in harmony with divinity and humanity. The *sangat*, in the social evolution of a devotee, is not only, according to Sikh conception, the highest social pursuit but it is God himself actualised.[1] Guru Nanak, moreover, also considered *sangat* to be a proper medium for communication of his message. When asked by the Jogis to perform a miracle, Guru had observed that he relied only on two things, the 'word' and the assembly.[2] The fundamental object behind the organization of *sangats* was to guide the followers of Guru to mould their lives according to the teachings of the master.

The followings which gathered around Guru Nanak were certainly the original nucleus of the Sikh *panth* and if one is to follow the organizational lines back through the Sikh history, we shall be able to proceed no farther than that and the origin of the Sikh community may be safely traced back to the institution of *sangat* or congregation founded by Guru Nanak. In due course of time the *sangats* became centres of Sikh missionary activity for the spread of Guru Nanak's message and for practical demonstration of his egalitarian message. These centres were set up at Kamrup (Assam), Bihar, Cuttack, Surat, Nanakmata, Jalalabad, Kasur and other places. These distant *sangats* were supervised by persons generally appointed by the Guru himself.

The locale of *sangat* was known as *dharmashala*.[3] Guru Nanak's own place of *sangat* or congregation at Kartarpur was known as 'Baba Nanak di Dharmasala'. From repeated references to erection and use of *dharmashalas*, it is clear that these buildings stood at the centre of corporate life of the *panth* and much activity must have been conducted within them. *Janam Sakhis* conclude many of their *Sakhis* with the announcement that a *dharmashala* was built.[4]

It is interesting to take note of a *sangat* at worship when a childless Raja was granted a son by Baba Nanak. Thus reads the *Janam Sakhi*: Beneath the Raja's palace was the *dharmashala* where the Sikh sang hymns and performed *kirtan*. One day, the Rani said to Raja, "Raja how is it that no children have been born in our house? Let us go to the *dharmashala* and lay our petition before the congregation (*sangat*), for the Guru is (present) in the congregation". "An excellent idea",

[1]*Adi Granth*, Sri Rag, p. 72.

[2]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 1, Pauri 42.

[3]The term *dharmashala* designates a rest house attached to a temple, but in case of Sikhs it meant a building in which Nanak's followers would meet for communal singing and meetings of the *sangat*. The *satsang* had long been a feature of the *bhakti* tradition. However, the significance of Sikh congregation lay in the existence of separate centres, *dharmashalas*.

[4]Often a new disciple converted his house into a *dharmashala*, see *Janam Sakhi* , B 40 f. 162b. Other references indicate that a portion of a house might be used as a *dharmashala*. Ibid., f. 167b, 173a.

replied the Raja. Next day the Raja and Rani both joined the congregation. It was an Ekadasi gathering and a large congregation was present. A *sabad* was being sung and all were sitting enthralled. The Raja and Rani then presented their petition (saying), "You are assembly of the Guru and (whatever) is sought from you is granted. May it please you (to hear our intercession) so that the Guru may grant us a son." Those who were present in the congregation, offered a prayer in order that Raja's faith might remain unshaken. Then they assured him that 'the Guru Baba will grant you a son.'[1]

In this illustration, apart from a glimpse of a *sangat*, we can observe the developing doctrine of the Gur *panth*, which affirms that in the absence of the personal Guru, the local *sangat* or congregation within any area possesses the mystical power to make decision on his behalf. In this way a divine character was attributed to the collective body of the holy assembly which became authoritative for the individual members of the congregation. A perfect rapport was supposed to exist between individual and collective will of the *sangat*. The individual Sikh should feel that his own voice is also a part of people's voice and the *sangat* is not only his self, enlarged and widened, but in its process of collectivity, it has also acquired a high degree of divinity. As such, the *sangat* is not just a collection of individuals but in being collected they have acquired a being, a personality and character which is holy and divine.

Since *sangats* became an expression of popular opinion it was inevitable that certain controversies and doctrinal questions would mark the functioning of early *sangats*. There was a scope for discussion due to difference of opinion, consensus being arrived at on many debatable issues and this was evidence of the fact that since habits die hard, it was not easy for the followers to adjust to new social religious norms. An important question was whether the early morning bath should be obligatory and from the amount of space devoted to it one can deduce that this must have been an issue of great concern in the *sangat*.[2] Another issue had evidently been the question of whether the followers of Guru Nanak should eat meat. The early version and a direct statement in the *Janam Sakhi* B 40 indicate that the *panth* permitted the practice.[3] We also find evidence of strong oppositions to the ascetic ideal and caste distinctions and this reflects not only the teachings of Guru Nanak but also the positive acceptance of these teachings by his followers. There is repeated insistence on the efficacy of the divine Name. "Previously men performed austerities for a hundred thousand years", said Baba Nanak to Kaliyug, "but in your age if any

[1]*Janam Sakhi*, B 40 (India Office Library MS Panj.) f. 196b-197a.
[2]*The Meharban Janam Sakhi*, 65.
[3]*Janam Sakhi*, B 40, f. 167a.

one meditates upon the divine name with undivided attention for a single moment he will be saved."[1] Reference is made also to the centrality of *kirtan* in the life of the community and an important feature that emerges in the pattern of life of early *sangat* is congregational worship, that is pursuance of religion as a group and not as an individual. Thus, Sikhism was made a congregational religion and the *sangat* became the social anchor for developing corporate life on egalitarian conceptions. Notwithstanding the divergent viewpoints on many issues, one can observe from the *Janam Sakhi* traditions a growing awareness of the community's nature and function as a distinct identity.

It was the step taken by Guru Nanak in creation of *sangats* that was to impart a distinguished character to the Bhakti movement of Punjab and a hallmark of permanency. The *sangats* played an important part in keeping Sikhs on the right path. It was fully competent to punish or forgive his faults. Even ordinary breaches of rules of conduct could be taken up to the local *sangat* and the congregation often gave its verdict through a select five. There seems to be an obvious parallel to 'punchayat' but the important thing is that the *sangat* was working as an autonomous body, the sanction being that the decision of the *sangat* was the collective will of the people. In time to come, the Sikh tradition came to regard *sangat* above the Guru saying that if Guru was equal to twenty parts the *sangat* was equal to twenty-one parts. Wonder-struck at the amount of intense faith in the *sangat* and its decisions, Mohsin Fani, the author of *Dabistan-i Mazahib* writes, "whenever a Sikh had a wish to be fulfilled, he made a request to the assembly and then it was referred to Guru or invoked to God. And whenever the Guru had a wish to be fulfilled he also placed it before the *sangat* considering it spiritually competent to get it granted through an efficacious prayer to that effect."[2] The decision will not only be just and true but its defiance would be a sin, a guilt which may cause greater suffering than that which was to result by implementation of the actual decision. The *sangat* normally worked in such an atmosphere where there was more of a moral force than the exercise of physical force. In between the moral and physical force there was also the social force, the fear of excommunication, a displeasure of the *sangat.*

In short, it may be remarked that spiritually the *sangats* helped the Sikhs in maturing their beliefs according to the instructions of the Guru. Socially, they provided opportunity to the people of all castes to meet together as equals and fortified a sense of community consciousness among the followers of Guru Nanak. The *sangats* also developed

[1]Ibid., f. 42a.
[2]*Dabistan-i Mazahib*, p. 239.

among the Sikhs strong democratic traditions which were later practised by them in the eighteenth century.

An institution of far reaching significance in the Sikh movement was the *langar* or community meal which symbolized a definite revolutionary change in the context of the times in which it was brought about and which won sympathy and approbation of Hindus and Muslims alike. Guru Nanak perceived that strong social barriers were created amongst different sections of people by the taboos in matters of food and it was one of the constitutive principle of the castes that there should be at last ritually inviolable barriers against complete commensalism among different castes.[1] The most widespread expression of the mutual repulsion and fragmentation of the caste society were the restrictions on commensalism and the notions of pollution. "Of the offences of which a caste panchayat took cognizance, the offences against the commensal taboos which prevent members of one caste from eating and drinking with members of another caste or at least of the other castes regarded by the prohibiting caste as lower in social status than themselves are, undoubtedly, the most important, for the transgression of caste by one member, if unknown and unpunished, may affect the whole caste with pollution through his commensality with the rest."[2] The general notion of pollution was so wide in its sphere of application that at times it was supposed to be incurred not only by partaking of food under certain conditions but by the mere bodily contact with persons of certain low castes whose traditional occupations whether actually followed or not or whose mode of life placed them outside the pale of Hindu society.

Guru Nanak was convinced that until and unless the so-called lower castes were made to feel that the disgraceful handicaps under which they suffered were removed, there could be no successful implementation of social equality and fraternization. His ideas of equality found practical expression in community mess or *langar* that helped to soften the edges of caste and class distinctions. The system of *langar*, it seems, was developed as a direct challenge to caste exclusiveness but it is less clear which of the Gurus was responsible for its development as such.[3] McLeod maintains that there is nothing to suggest that the

[1]Max Weber, op. cit., p. 128.

[2]Hutton, op. cit., p. 72.

[3]Following writers maintain that Guru Nanak was the founder of *langar*. Prakash Singh, *The Sikh Gurus and Temple of Bread*; p. 10. Teja Singh, *Sikhism*, p. 111; Ganda Singh, ed., *A History of Sikhs*, p. 50; Khushwant Singh, op. cit., vol. I, p. 43; G.S. Chhabra, *Advanced Study in History of Punjab*, vol. I, p. 103. Teja Singh later revised his opinion. In his article "The Religion of Sikh Gurus in Cultural History of India", vol. IV, he made Guru Amar Das the founder of *langar*.

earliest *dharmashala* necessarily included a *langar* as an anti-caste institution and it is Guru Amar Das who is credited with having established with regular financial support the *langar* through the *manjis.*[1] Notwithstanding the statement of McLeod it seems more appropriate, however, that the system of *langar* had been set on foot by Nanak himself. Guru Nanak was vehemently opposed to notions of caste exclusiveness and it is possible that he used his kitchen as a practical means of expressing that opposition. The foundation of institution of *langar* by Guru Nanak is referred to in incidents in *Janam Sakhis.*[2] It is possible that the system introduced by Guru Nanak was enlarged by Angad and got crystallized and consolidated under Guru Amar Das. In the *Adi Granth* it is said of Guru Angad that following Guru Nanak, he maintained a *langar* in which Guru's *sabad* (a commodity from God) which comes in never failing supply was distributed.[3] The coronation ode also says that Angad's wife distributed the Guru's wealth in his kitchen by preparing rice boiled in milk (*kheer*) which tasted like ambrosia (*amrit*).[4]

It seems most probable that the institutions of *sangat* and *langar* originated almost simultaneously. They added to the functional efficiency of the Sikh organization and helped in cementing the bonds of cohesion among the followers of Guru Nanak. There was a sharp reaction to these from the orthodox Hindus. To them they meant nothing less than pollution to allow different strata to mingle on equal footing. They considered it scandalous that Nanak should lift the ban on commensal taboos which were regarded by them as the bedrock of Hinduism. But unmindful of all criticisms, Nanak boldly carried on his experiments. The institution of *langar* was to become an important integrative agent within the Sikh brotherhood. In a society where caste rules for cooking and eating had got mixed up with notions of personal piety and pollution, Guru Nanak's call to all people to get together without considerations of caste was a radical message. He not only urged upon his followers to participate in the community cooking and serving of meals, but they were also made to eat together irrespective of their castes. Thus to the *langars* were added *pangats* i.e., sitting together of all present in *langar* in rows for dining irrespective of caste, creed, high or low, Hindus and Muslims. In his appraisal of the *langar*, as a characteristic Sikh institution, Prof. Harbans Singh writes that, "The

[1]W.H. McLeod, "The Life and Doctrine of Guru Nanak", Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1965, pp. 383-84.

[2]*The Hafizabad Janam Sakhi,* p. 53. *The Meharban Janam Sakhi,* p. 238.

[3]*Adi Granth*, Rag Ramkali. pp. 966-67. Sahib Singh calls it 'Namahda *langar*', see *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Darpan*, vol. VII, p. 231.

[4]*Adi Granth*, p. 967.

common food was eaten by all inmates and visitors alike, sitting in rows together signifying surrender of caste scruples and affirming their new sense of identity."[1] The institution of *langar* or dining together at a common place without any inhibitions has continued throughout in the Sikh history. Even today the Sikh gurdwaras have common kitchen and dining place attached to them where people of all classes, even belonging to different religious denominations, can dine together. In doing away with the accepted restrictions on inter-caste commensalism, the Sikh movement removed one of the constitutive principles of the caste. The success of the Sikh *langar* in fostering the spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization and in developing unrestricted commensalism among its members has been remarkable indeed. Through the *sangat* and *langar* Nanak was trying to inculcate feelings of brotherhood among his followers.

Guru Nanak is also unique among medieval *bhaktas* in his acceptance of women as equal human beings of God. Prior to Nanak, the position of women both in Hindu and Muslim society was one of subordination and suffering. Most of the medieval saints did not regard women as an obstacle to salvation but none of them not even Kabir, whose social thinking was derived from his strong belief in the fundamental equality of all human beings, ever assigned equal status to women. Very often woman is described as impediment to spiritual enlightenment.[2] Often women are depicted as undependable and lustful which need chastisement, "A drum, a villager, a Shudra, an animal and a woman deserve to be chastised."[3] Women were considered intellectually inferior and denied the right of reading the Vedas. They were also victims of grave social evils such as child marriage, *sati* and infanticide. The idea of becoming *sati* on the funeral of the deceased husband was noticed by Alberuni.[4] Ibn Batuta also noticed the case of a *sati* in Pakpattan on his arrival in Punjab.[5] There was a general appreciation for the supreme sacrifice of the Hindu woman when she committed *sati*. The spot where the widow became *sati*, often became a place of worship.[6] Women preferred to commit *sati* because widow remarriage was prohibited and they were ill treated as long as they lived. The widow dressed herself in coarse clothes, lived with her own people in misery and was despised for suspected lack of fidelity.[7] According to Ganesh Das, no respectable Khatri could ever marry a widow or a divorced woman and still

[1]Harbans Singh, *Guru Nanak and Origin of the Sikh Faith*, p. 180.
[2]Kabir, *Granthavali*, 3.2, 3.16, 3.20.
[3]Tulsi, *Manasa*, 5/59/3.
[4]*Alberuni's India*, tr. E. Sachau, p. 155.
[5]Ibn Batuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, tr. H.A.R. Gibb, p. 191.
[6]Ganesh Das, op. cit., p. 188.
[7]Ibn Batuta *Travels in Asia and Africa*, tr. H.A.R. Gibb, p. 191.

remain respectable.[1]

The deteriorating position of women in medieval India is often linked to Muslim invasion, growing insecurity, institutionalized forms such as seclusion (*purdah*) and large establishment of harems maintained by the ruling class. Under the influence of Muslim orthodox elements, *purdah* became more widespread particularly among those who claimed status of respectability. Notwithstanding the impact of Islam it is, however, important to note that in North India the degraded position of women prevailed long before the advent of Islam and that neither harem nor *purdah* were new to India. Subordination and suffering of women had been sanctified for several centuries.[2] The growing rigidity of society between the eighth and twelfth centuries had led to further deterioration in the position of women in India. It is important to note that Muslim religious law made no distinction between man and woman in matters of faith and religion and that Muslim women had better rights to property as well as divorce and remarriage, yet these were not extended to Hindu women as a result of the Muslim impact. The positive features of Muslim presence did not mitigate the disabilities of Hindu women who continued to remain the suppressed part of society.

Guru Nanak pleaded emphatically for justice and his conception of humanity is extended to both halves of human race. Guru Nanak was in favour of full respect for women and denounced the so-called leaders of society for attributing low status to women who had contributed to the continuation of human race. "Why call her low who gives birth to great men", asked Guru Nanak.[3] Guru Nanak was prepared to defend women against those who had reduced her to a status of subordination and exploitation on the basis of sex. There is emphatic condemnation of those Jogis who remained celibates, yet were carrying lust for women in their hearts.[4] Sikhism does not consider avowed celibacy as a form of worship; marriage is commended as the normal condition of life. For Nanak, marriage however is not a concession to the human weakness. It is a means of spiritual growth. "They are not man and wife who have physical contact only; only they are truly wedded who have one spirit in two bodies."[5] Sikh monotheism affirming the oneness of God demands a fusion of two souls which every married couple

[1]Ganesh Das, op. cit., p. 292.

[2]The *Matsya Purana* authorises the husband to beat his erring wife, *Matsya Purana*, CCXXVII, 153-55. The duty of a woman to obey her husband blindly is illustrated by law giver, Manu, who expects such service from wife as befits a servant, Manu, VIII, 299-300.

[3]*Adi Granth*, Rag Asa, p. 473.

[4]Ibid., p. 1013.

[5]Ibid., p. 788.

should represent. A large number of Guru Nanak's *banis* relating to women refer to conjugal relationship.[1] Man and woman are instinctively oriented to one another and can fulfil the logic for which God has created them only by sharing their lives in matrimonial partnership with one another. Guru Nanak thought and spoke of conjugal relationship in monogamous terms. According to the Sikh ethics marriage has a metaphysical and social role to perform. There can be no separation once the marriage has been performed and the couple under the guidance of Guru must consciously learn to create fusion of mind. Adultery was condemned and fidelity was a trait to be cultivated by both man and woman. Here Guru Nanak broke new ground, for earlier fidelity was expected only from women. In the compositions of Nanak are recorded sufferings of those who indulge in illicit relationships after marriage.[2] Bhai Gurdas expects men to be faithful to their spouses. He said consider beautiful women of others as mothers, sisters and daughters.[3]

To ensure respect for women Nanak prescribed a very strict discipline of the greatest possible faithfulness to each other and both were supposed to make family the first step towards actualization of God in society. Thus family, the smallest unit of Sadh *sangat*, becomes the workshop, the mint, as Guru calls in the Japji.[4] In this workshop many qualities of character are worked and hammered out. In this way the family is the essential unit of society and it becomes an important training ground where woman is an equal partner in decisions about moral and material well-being of its members. Guru Nanak encouraged women to read the scriptures and participate in the congregational worship on equal footing with men. "The mouth (whether that of a man or woman) that ever singeth and praiseth Him is fortunate and beautiful. That face shines in the court of God", said Guru Nanak.[5] It was a revolutionary step in view of the fact that Hindu women were not allowed to read the Vedas or perform ceremonial duties in the temples because they were regarded impure. Guru Nanak emphasized and strongly condemned notions of impurity about women. At no stage she was to be regarded impure and Guru Nanak declared:

> If the idea of impurity (*sutak*) is admitted, then there is impurity in everything. The cow-dung and the wood contain worms and there is no grain of corn without life. There is life in water, which is used in kitchen.

[1]See for instance *Adi Granth*, Sri Rag, p. 17: Rag Gauri, p. 242; Rag Suhi, p. 764; Rag Tukhali, pp. 1109-10, Rag Sorathi, p. 1232; Rag Tilang, p. 729.
[2]*Adi Granth*, Var Malar, p. 1288.
[3]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 26, Pauri 11.
[4]*Adi Granth*, Japji, para 38.
[5]Ibid., p. 473.

> How can one avoid impurity then? Impurity is washed away by divine knowledge alone.[1]

Guru Nanak is silent on issues like *sati* and widow remarriage but it is possible that successor Gurus were inspired by his ideal of respect and equality for women, when they made a frontal attack on evils of infanticide and *sati*. The third Guru Amar Das vehemently attacked *sati* and said,

> The real *sati* was one who after the death of her husband led a pure and chaste life. And not the one who burnt herself on her husband's pyre. The *satis* are those who abide in modesty and contentment, who watch upon their Lord and ever remember him.[2]

Widow remarriage was allowed in Sikhism provided they themselves desired to do so. In Hinduism the right of remarriage was given only to men but Sikhism, recognising the inherent equality, extended this to women as well. Within twenty year after Guru Nanak, the third Guru Amar Das commissioned worthy women to work as preachers and give spiritual instructions to all and he aimed at gradual emancipation of women from the age-old socio-religious disabilities. The Sikh scripture legitimizes complete equality for women.

Guru Nanak's conception of society is free from taboos and prejudices born out of sex. It is, however, important to note that Nanak's concept of equality of sexes did not mean freedom for women in the sense freedom is understood in the modern context. The image of an ideal woman that emerges is not unconventional. Even if she is beautiful and accomplished, she is supposed to be humble and completely devoted to her husband and family. However, this does not detract from the fact that in the context of medieval India Guru Nanak envisaged a revolutionary transformation in the position of women for "she was not only not inferior to men but had equal status and responsibility before God."[3] She was not a source of evil but means of healthy social living. According to Kapur Singh,

> Sikhism not only repudiates the nexus between *karma* and social status of Hindu women but declares her as the very essence of social coherence and progress and condemns any suggestion of relegating her to an inferior status in any manner whatsoever.[4]

[1]Ibid., p. 772.
[2]Ibid., Rag Suhi, p. 787.
[3]Ibid., Rag Tilang, p. 722.
[4]Kapur Singh, *Prashasprasana or Baisakhi* of Guru Gobind Singh, p. 274.

A very significant aspect of Nanak's social philosophy was his concept of the householder's life given to practical activity. The Sikh ethics stand for the ideal of commendation of the householder's life in which man, while living the life of religious devotion, is at the same time centred in the sphere of social responsibility. To maintain a harmonized balance between attachment and detachment, between worldliness and other-worldliness, between temporal and spiritual, has never been easy for human beings. Yet this was the task which Guru Nanak[1] set himself to, and as one goes through the life and activities of the Gurus and the history of Sikh society one feels that they carried out the temporal duties and obligations to the full in accordance with the needs of their families and, at the same time, as much of the community they led. The discipline and methods suggested by the Sikh Gurus for attaining spiritual goal in any system have a close relevance and correlation to the social role. In fact, the cohesion and social solidarity of the Sikh community was due to the fact that as a religion Sikh faith is committed to both God and society. The practical aspects of spiritual training are not to be in a secluded monastery but in the family and that is why the responsibilities of a householder are accepted, legitamized and stressed by each of the Sikh Gurus.

Since Sikhism as a social system recognizes the household i.e. *grihasta* stage of life as the most ideal, Guru Nanak[2] vehemently condemned all those ascetics and Jogis who cut themselves off from society and lived on alms. He says in this context, "Oh Jogi, thou building a hut live far away, yet thou beg food from door to door."[3] Again, "Jogi burns with the pangs of hunger and runs about begging."[4] Guru Nanak raised his voice against begging and declared, "The man who is unfit to earn his livelihood gets his ears split."[5]

In fact begging is denounced in several passages in the Sikh scripture. One who is absorbed in God, why should he go begging alms.[6] Again, "Do not call them mendicants who eat at other people's places. They put on holy garbs in order to fill their bellies."[7] "I may become Jogi and roam about in the world, receiving alms from door to door. But

[1]In this context one may refer to Guru Nanak's setting aside the claims of his son Sri Chand for Guru-ship because he had exhibited ascetic tendencies and subsequently Guru Amar Das weaned away the Sikh from Udasis, an ascetic sect, founded by Sri Chand.

[2]For Nanak's reaction against ascetic attitudes of Jogis refer to chapter 2.

[3]*Adi Granth*, p. 152.

[4]Ibid., p. 661.

[5]Ibid., p. 1245.

[6]Ibid., p. 953.

[7]Ibid., p. 949.

when I have to render account in God's court hereafter how shall I repay my debt to large number of people."[1]

In fact, parasitism and begging were grave social evils, against which Nanak reacted in unequivocal terms. He enjoined upon all his followers the primary obligation of practical activity in the shape of manual labour. Even for those who can afford to live without soiling their hands Guru Nanak seemed to have prescribed that amount of manual labour at least which would justify their daily bread, a compulsory activity. The need of an epitome level of economic security for each individual and family coupled with a balance between spiritual growth and material comfort can hardly be over emphasised. Some of the saints mentioned in *Adi Granth*, notably Dhanna and Kabir, asked the Lord for affording two square meals daily plus other reasonable comforts of life so that they could concentrate on the divine pursuit unhampered by physical wants. Guru Nanak too, while he insisted on earning one's living, cautioned against an excess of material enjoyment and accumulation. Some of his verses in Sri Raga are notable for their picturesque presentation of material attractions of life that tend to impede progress towards spiritual uplift.[2]

Accumulation of property beyond a certain level does not find favour with the Guru. The arguments advanced in this context are both on the spiritual and social planes. While it is repeatedly stressed that greediness for wealth is a big impediment in the way of spiritual progress, an equally strong ground on which it is disfavoured is that its accumulation is rendered possible only by acts of injustice and high-handed encroachment of what belongs to others. "Those who believed that a cloth soiled with blood became defiled why could they not see that one who sucked human blood did not remain pure."[3] Likewise an ill-gotten income should indeed be like pork to the Muslim and like beef to the Hindus.[4] It is on the principle of social justice that Nanak laid stress on *haq-halal* (righteousness) in earning and forbade encroachment by one of what rightfully belongs to another.

A careful perusal of Guru Nanak's compositions reveals his familiarity with economic aspects of life and several professions and occupations came under his observations. However, quite often he judges the activities of various people, involved in economic action, from his moral criterion. For instance, he exhorts man to trade in such goods that are lasting, only these will be credited to their account by the wise *sahu*.[5] Occasionally

[1]Ibid., p. 1089.
[2]Ibid., Sri Rag, p. 14.
[3]Ibid., Var Majh, p. 140.
[4]Ibid., p. 141.
[5]Ibid., Sri Rag, p. 22.

a metaphor is used to bring home the moral teaching in view. For example one may spend millions, immense wealth may pass through one's hands but if one received no honour in God's court, one has no place of honour.[1] Again, God is the true *sahu*, men are his agents.[2] God is real lender, men are accountable to Him.[3] One can never purchase the goods without paying the due price.[4] He is the perfect weigher who weighs the balance of faith.[5] Men break into shops and homes to steal and they return cautiously looking before and looking behind, but where can they hide from God. In fact, in economic activity Guru Nanak lays a great deal of stress on right action. If one reaped what one sowed and ate the fruits of one's profit, it was as necessary to do positive good as to avoid evil.[6] One should earn one's livelihood honestly.[7]

The broad outline of his social philosophy got practical expression when Guru Nanak settled at Kartarpur with his family in around 1520. Bhai Gurdas says, "*Dharmashala Kartarpur, Sadha sangati sachkhand vasaia.*"[8] (In Kartarpur Guru built a *dharmashala* and in the *sangat* established a microcosm of *Sachkhand* i.e., abode of God). The land for such a village would have had to be procured in some way and *Janam Sakhis*[9] leave a brief account of a wealthy man who developed great reverence for Guru Nanak. Probably he built the small village of Kartarpur or more likely donated the land on which it was subsequently built. It is at Kartarpur that the life of the founding Guru—what he did, what he preached and what he composed—became a new means of inspiration for the new community of followers to relate themselves to the patterns laid by him. No wonder, Kartarpur became a true demonstrative laboratory for the practical training of his followers. It is here that Sikhism as a systematized regular way of life was first experimented. Previously the message had been of greater importance; now Guru Nanak turned his attention to the fruits of his preaching.

The pattern of life at Kartarpur witnessed crystallization of some of the fundamental planks of Nanak's social philosophy. First of all giving

[1]Ibid., Rag Asa, p. 358.

[2]Ibid., Var Majh, p. 140; Rag Basant, p. 1171; Rag Gauri, p. 155; Rag Suhi, p. 729.

[3]Ibid., Rag Suhi, p. 751; Var Malhar, p. 1288.

[4]Ibid., Rag Gauri, p. 226.

[5]Ibid., Sri Rag, p. 59.

[6]Ibid., Rag Suhi, p. 730.

[7]Ibid., Rag Vadhane, p. 566.

[8]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 24, Pauri 1.

[9]*Meharban Janam Sakhi*, p. 516; *Puratan Janam Sakhi*, p. 74; *Gyan Ratnavali Sakhi*, p. 401.

up his weird costume, he donned the 'worldly garment'.[1] Now there could be no mistake that his opposition to complete renunciation of life was not confined to any argument or discussion with the Jogis, but meant to be taken seriously. Guru Nanak had by now completely rejected asceticism and, as a necessary corollary to the disciplined worldliness, he preached and insisted that each of his disciples should live on what he had himself laboured to earn. Guru and his sons themselves did farming to set an example so that none at Kartarpur would be allowed to become an exception. To be able to achieve integration of temporal and spiritual seems to have been a very significant feature of the Kartarpur pattern and moreover in rural agricultural society the emphasis on manual work encouraged an active and positive attitude to worldly life. Honest creative labour was thus a fundamental ingredient of social behaviour at Kartarpur.

Further it was again at Kartarpur that the Guru evolved a congregational pattern of religious worship. There is a good deal of emphasis upon *satsang* in the compositions of Nanak and this ideal found practical expression in the corporate worship at Kartarpur. It is important to note that comradeship in faith not only helped in mitigating caste distinctions among followers in worship but also fostered a feeling of conscious self-identity in the new social order.

A very conspicuous development that characterized the life at Kartarpur was that the way was being prepared for the *bani*, the utterances of Guru Nanak, to be revised and collected and ultimately regarded as the scripture.[2] The Guru was insisting that the knowledge was to be found in his utterances and compositions at least to the same degree as it was in the Vedas (this was a logical corollary of his rejection of scriptural authority and rituals alluded in them). Given the clarity and coherence of the pattern of Guru Nanak's religious thought, the adoption of his compositions virtually as a scripture was of crucial significance for the simple reason that insistence on separate scriptural ideology was an indication of a separate social order, committed to different socio-religious values. Guru Nanak's dynamic social role made such a success of the Kartarpur experiment that within a few years of its establishment some of his prominent disciples were instructed

[1]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 1, Pauri 38. Vir Singh writes, *Guruji ne faquiri bana lah dita si, is to magroh pher koi pehrava nahain dharia, hun satguruji ne sadharan sansari kapde paihne si*; cf. Vir Singh, *Sri Guru Nanak Chamatkar*, p. 223.

[2]To deepen the spiritual atmosphere of the centre, Guru Nanak composed some of the sublime verses and hymns and sang them to the tune of Mardana's *rabab*—till the latter died—and then utilized the services of Mardana's son Shehzada. The four compositions Var Malar, Var Majh, Var Asa and Japji combined with the pattern of *grihastha* life had a profound impact on Nanak's followers who had chosen to reside at Kartarpur.

to set up similar centres in far off places and they ran these in subordination to the parent centre of Sikh activity at Kartarpur.

Guru Nanak's decision to appoint a successor[1] was also a very significant event at Kartarpur and there can be no doubt that it was the establishment of effective succession of Gurus which forms the most important distinguishing feature of Guru Nanak's social role as compared to other medieval saints. The nomination of a successor had far-reaching sociological implications for the evolution of Sikh community. While, it ensured the transmission and further promotion of the first Guru's teachings, the institution and charisma of Guru-ship provided by far the most effective means for strengthening organisational solidarity and community consciousness among the Sikhs.[2]

In short, the nature of Guru Nanak's utterances and his social ideology points towards a well thought out plan, on his part, for the development of a well defined and systematized way of life for his followers. It should not be difficult to see that a major omission of those who reduce the compositions of Guru Nanak to mere metaphysical or theological category is the denial of the significance of his revolutionary social vision which is comprehensive in nature taking within its range the totality of the society. Nanak's compositions bear eloquent testimony of his concern about social discrimination, economic exploitation, miscarriage of justice, evils of Brahminical domination, social decadence and many other evils of the contemporary society. In passionate words he criticized the sloth of the Brahmins and their retrogressive and reactionary role which had led to an endless fragmentation of society. Guru Nanak was concerned with redemption of the human situation and made a sincere bid for changing what was dead and rotten. He was an activist social reformer and was very particular in laying stress on one aspect of life he had initiated namely to take into consideration the socio-temporal aspect of life as seriously as the ethico-spiritual. The religion he founded was not to remain

[1]Guru Nanak nominated his most sincere disciple Lehna, as his successor in preference to his own sons. Bhai Gurdas writes, "He (Nanak) struck his coin in the world and inaugurated the establishment of holy *panth*. Before he died (Guru Nanak) installed Lehna and set the Guru's canopy over his head. Merging his light in Guru Angad's light, the Satguru changed his form. None could comprehend this, he revealed a wonder of wonders and changing his body he made Guru Angad's his own. Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 1, Pauri 45. The name Angad was chosen because Lehna was to be a replica of his master. He was to be a limb from Nanak's own body. *Puratan Janam Sakhi,* p. 108; *Janam Sakhi,* B 40, ff. 93a, 95a.

[2]The nomination of a successor by Guru Nanak is normally regarded as one of the three key events in the evolution of Sikh community, the other two being compilation of the *Granth Sahib* by Guru Arjun and third the foundation of 'Khalsa' by Guru Gobind Singh.

content with the salvation of individual alone but aimed at the uplift of the society as well.

In the social philosophy of Guru Nanak there is, however, no blueprint which can be proclaimed as an ideal economic plan. Rather, economic values based on and leading to social justice have been incorporated in individual social behaviour. A very commendable part of the Guru's teaching which however has socio-economic significance is the combination of labour, sharing its fruit and contemplation of God's name, which got popularized in the form of a well known socio-economic formula—'*kirat karo, wand chhako Nam japo*'. It means (a) thou shall earn thy livelihood by honest creative labour, (b) thou shall share the fruits of thy labour with other fellow beings, and (c) thou shall practice the discipline of Name. The first of the commandments forbids parasitism in any form since stress is laid on *kirat* i.e. honest productive labour. In the second, emphasis is laid on sharing the fruits of labour. In the third part of the formula, contemplation is upheld implying the avoidance of an imbalance that may be caused by an obsession in acquiring capital. It is clear that the Guru was trying to build up an image of a society in which earning one's living by hard labour and giving part of it in charity were considered to be the highest virtues. In the context of today's world, it would imply acceptance of dignity of manual labour, meeting of social obligations by making donations for relief work and supporting the efforts of humanitarian institutions and pursuit by each man of an enlightened, balanced economic activity. He was clearly in favour of a system in which each individual was enabled to work with due regard for collective need. Sikhism conceives of religious evolution of man as a necessary and integral prerequisite and condition towards the growth of an ideal society. A good society does not seem to be possible without good individuals who compose it. Guru Nanak chose to address the individual and pleaded with him to be worthy of a society which he preferred to call 'Sadh Sangat'.

In short, the social vision of Guru Nanak is characterized by a sense of strong mission on his part to make fresh beginnings. Any religion and religious society evolves within a given social situation. Keeping in view the intensity of caste milieu Nanak was up against, it was nothing short of a revolutionary phenomenon that he was able to strike an independent and new path as the founder of Sikhism. Again it was Guru Nanak who gave a distinct shape to his egalitarian message by setting up a community of followers coming from diverse social and ethnic groups. He did not merely utter a few verbal protests against the institution of the caste, rather he took concrete steps to break the shackles of the caste system by delegitimizing it in the new social order shaped by him. Many internal feuds and sectarian divisions

appeared subsequently among the Sikhs but the identity and integrity of the community Guru Nanak had set up, remained intact. Thus Guru Nanak, over and above being a mystic, was the harbinger of a new social order. In his very life time he found himself the leader of a community which, inspired by his radicalism, exhibited a progressive social outlook. His dynamic social vision and ideals acquired a more definite shape under the successor Gurus.

5

Social Dimensions of Sikhism During the Sixteenth Century

Sikhism, though founded and consecrated by Guru Nanak, saw further systematization of its beliefs and organization in the next generation of successor Gurus. The rudimentary institutional structure carved out by Guru Nanak was by itself a unique and original feature, but the secular and organizational dimensions added by the successor Gurus were no less responsible for providing a distinctiveness to the Sikh *panth* within the broad framework of the medieval Bhakti movement. The period of four Gurus (AD 1539-1606) from Guru Angad to Guru Arjun, the fifth in the line of succession, is very important as it witnessed the flowering of the germinal ideas propounded by Guru Nanak. The Sikh *panth* developed a more formalized organizational structure and the Sikh community took a definite shape and *panthic* identity, quite distinct from the Hindu Brahminical society on the one hand and the Muslim socio-cultural and political phenomenon on the other. Institutional innovations by the successor Gurus and the numerical expansion of the Sikh constituency consisting of diverse social and economic segments did not, however, affect the central core of the Sikh faith and the ideological emphases remained still those of Guru Nanak. Trumpp rightly puts it:

> The doctrines uttered by Baba Nanak were taken by the following Sikh Gurus without any perceptible deviation and after the volume of the *Granth* had been compiled by Guru Arjun, they were never called into question, the *Granth* being held as the immediate divine revelation.[1]

Hence the person and the teachings of the founder Guru, continued to provide a vital force for common loyalty. The succeeding Gurus had a legacy of conscious inheritance and they elaborated, in the

[1]E. Trumpp, The *Adi Granth*, p. xviii.

context of their own times, what they had imbibed from Guru Nanak. The significant contribution of the first four successor Gurus is the initiation of policies and programmes that led to the consolidation of the founder Guru's message and mission on the one hand and imparting of 'new contours and dimensions' on the other. The rise and emergence of Sikhism as a significant socio-religious phenomenon, the development of a community with the consciousness of a distinct religious identity, reinforced by its particular institutions, distinct socio-religious customs for marriage and death rites, foundation of separate centres for Sikh pilgrimage—all these developments can be adequately understood in terms of response by the successor Gurus to environmental pressures for preservation and strengthening of a definite Sikh identity and ideology. "The confirming of distinctively Sikh status upon specific places, specific occasions and specific rituals underlined the social differences between the Sikhs and the contemporaries." Mohsin Fani was quick in noticing the erosions caused in the citadel of Hindu orthodoxy by the socio-religious practices of the Sikhs and in *Dabistan* he makes references to certain concepts upheld by successor Gurus after Guru Nanak. He writes, "The disciples of Guru Nanak do not read the *mantras* and the Vedas of the Hindus. They do not venerate idols, temples nor hold *avataras* in esteem. They have no regard for Sanskrit which is the language of Gods."[1] The Sikhs were led to a belief, by the writings of their Gurus and those of Bhai Gurdas, the chief exponent of Sikh faith, to the effect that Sikhism is the only true religion in Kaliyug.[2] The *Janam Sakhi* traditions also give emphatic expression to the distinctive nature and the divine sanction for the *panth* of Guru Nanak. Thus, "Guru Nanak, your *panth* will flourish. I shall bless your *panth.* Inculcate devotion towards me and strengthen men's devotion to their *dharma*. As the Vaishnavas have their place of worship, the Jogis their *asans* and the Muslims their mosques, so your followers shall have their *dharmashala.*"[3]

Apart from the qualitative differences arising out of the religious and spiritual character of the new faith, it was the organizational structure of the new community that imparted solidarity and cohesion to the Sikh ranks and consequently fused the far flung and diverse units into a single well-integrated social order. To any system of religious beliefs, the establishment of necessary institutions acts as a great cementing force. Guru Nanak himself, after he settled at Kartarpur, had founded the institutions of *sangat, langar* and *dharmashala*. The

[1]Mohsin Fani, *Dabistan-i Mazahib*, p. 233.
[2]Bhai Gurdas, *Vars* 1, 16, Pauris 23, 29, 45.
[3]*Janam Sakhi,* B 40, f. 125b. For another statement of the Sikh distinctiveness see *Meharban Janam Sakhi,* pp. 411-14.

process was accelerated under his successors in response to the requirements of the growing Sikh community. Within a quarter of the century after Guru Nanak's death, the numerical following of the Gurus and the geographical extension of the *panth* extended considerably and it became necessary for Guru Amar Das to appoint ecclesiastical representatives to look after the affairs of the Sikh *sangat* at places other than his own headquarters. As the number of new centres increased, the function and status of Guru's representative too became more definite and specific and Guru Arjun devised a system for collection of revenue from the community to finance the erection of temples, new townships and to manage free kitchens i.e. *langar*, where devotees could eat a simple meal together, regardless of class and caste distinctions. The organizational aspects of the Sikh community were further strengthened through a sound economic base, achieved by the patronage and support of trading and commercial community of the Khatris and Jat agriculturists, who formed a significant section of the Sikh constituency. With the financial backing of both the trading and agriculturist groups, big projects of the Gurus for expansion and consolidation of Sikhism could be carried through along with maintaining the viability of *langar* for the increasing number of the Sikhs. By the time of the fifth Guru Arjun, the Sikh *panth* had developed a solid organizational and financial base. A feeling of comradeship born out of common faith and loyalty for the Guru and intense social solidarity were in evidence among the Sikhs in the sixteenth century. The rejection of Hindu Varnashrama-dharma played its own role in promoting cohesiveness and assertion of an independent social identity among them. The emergence of a distinct identity of Sikhs, resulted, however, as we shall see later, in alienation of both the Brahminical and Muslim orthodoxy and the state. In the struggle that ensued from the resistance and opposition, spiritual and secular motifs got co-mingled with each other symbolized by increasing social solidarity and prosperity under Guru Arjun and then with Guru Hargobind donning in AD 1606, on the occasion of his assumption of Guru-ship, two swords, one representing temporal power (*miri*) and the other spiritual (*piri*). It is in this characteristic co-mingling of the sacred and secular, that one can assess the nature of the social dimensions of Nanak's faith under the first four successor Gurus (AD 1539-1606) when it made rapid strides organizationally and numerically, marching ahead towards its distinct panthic identity.

One single strongest factor that imparted distinctive coherence and strength in the matter of evolution of the Sikh community was the concept and institution of Guru-ship. "The charismatic appeal of either the initiator or one of his early successors is a feature typical of successful religious movements and there is no reason to suppose that

the Nanakpanth was in any sense an exception to this rule."[1] The concept of preceptor and of spiritual succession was familiar to Hindu or Muslim tradition and not alien even to Buddhist mind but the institution of centralised Guru-ship i.e. the phenomenon of ten Gurus or teachers of equal spiritual status and sharing the same revelation and having the same sanctity, is peculiar to Sikhism. The status which is attributed to Guru Nanak is explicitly declared to be the result of a divine commission received direct from God and this assumption is further strongly supported by *Janam Sakhi* traditions[2] as also Nanak's own *banis*.

Though every Guru represented a definite phase in the process of practical development of Sikh faith and community, yet it is possible to discern a basic harmony and continuity attributed primarily to the ever present Nanak legend. "We need, therefore, not anxiously distinguish between the words of Baba Nanak and those of the following Gurus because the later Nanaks, as the Guru's followers believed, were acting on the inspiration mediated to them from Guru Nanak."[3]

In fact, the nature and connotation of the spiritual transmission in the system of the Sikh Gurus was unique in so far as ten men were successively Gurus but a single spirit inhabited them all and all bore the name of Nanak. The Sikh Guru-ship was not a temporal rank to be inherited by Guru Nanak's successor. Nanak left his body and transmitted his light to another person who became Nanak II, Angad by name. The Guru-ship was thus a spiritual mission and the spirit of the Master blended with that of the disciple who, on his part, completely merged his personality with that of the founder-Guru. And thus Angad became a continuation of Nanak. In the same way all the succeeding Gurus merged themselves in the preceding Nanak Guru and became a continuation of Nanak themselves. The belief is confirmed in the *Granth Sahib* itself in an unambiguous and authentic reference to the nature of succession. In Var Ramkali[4] it is stated that not only the second Nanak had the same light which the first Guru had but also the mode of life and activities of Angad were the same because Nanak simply changed bodies from one to another. The idea of the unity of Guru-ship is clear and consistent in the *vars* of Bhai Gurdas also. The characteristic phrase expressing the unity of Guru-ship in the *vars* of

[1]W.H. McLeod, "The Sikh Panth", in *The Sants. Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India,* eds., Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod, p. 23. Also see Terry Thomas in *Sikhism: The Voice of the Guru*, units 12-13 of the Open University Series—Man's Religious Quest, p. 63.

[2]*Janam Sakhi,* B 40 ff. 123b; *Meharban Janam Sakhi*, pp. 1-3, *Puratan Janam Sakhi*, pp. 14-16.

[3]Harbans Singh, *Guru Nanak and Origins of the Sikh Faith*, p. 213.

[4]*Adi Granth,* Var Ramkali, p. 967.

Bhai Gurdas is the blending of the light (of Guru Nanak) with the light of Angad as he refers to the transference of the light from the predecessor to the successor.[1] This awareness of the personality of Guru Nanak acting amidst them through the successor Gurus was so strong among the Sikhs that Mohsin Fani writing a century after Guru Nanak says, "Their belief is that all Gurus are identical with Nanak"[2] and further, "Whosoever does not acknowledge Guru Arjun to be the very self of Baba Nanak becomes a non-believer."[3] Finally, Guru Gobind put the seal on the nature of Guru-ship and made the whole thing explicit in his autobiography entitled '*Bachitra Nanak*'. Thus—

> The Holy Nanak was turned as Angad.
> Angad was recognised as Amar Das and Amar Das became
> Ram Das.
> When Ram Das was blended with God,
> he gave Guru-ship to Arjun.
> The pious saw this but not the fools who thought them all distinct.
> But some rare persons recognised that they were all one.[4]

The belief in the oneness and unity of the Gurus was a constant reality and it was further reinforced by the fact that all Gurus composed and sang under the one common name of Nanak and not under their own respective names.[5] The Guru is not simply the inner voice of God but the personal manifestation of that voice in Nanak. "From this it follows that the divine word must be identified with the actual utterances of Guru Nanak and so the term *sabad* is almost exclusively used as a synonym for a 'hymn' of Nanak. The same usage is also applied to the compositions of his successors for all were but different manifestations of the same single Guru."

Thus, the institution of centralized Guru-ship in Sikhism was a factor of profound significance which ensured solidarity and cohesion of the movement since its very inception. The Guru continued to be the central unifying personality and Guru Nanak, the first Guru, provided charismatic leadership, in spirit, in spite of changes by way of successor. Since the successor Gurus were representing the spirit of Nanak they had as such the same powers for taking decisions in the context of changed circumstances. Professor Grewal has rightly emphasised, "This

[1]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 1, Pauri 45.
[2]Mohsin Fani, op. cit., p. 232.
[3]Ibid., p. 237.
[4]Guru Gobind Singh, *Bachitra Nanak*, pp. 56-57.
[5]In the *Adi Granth* all hymns of the Sikh Gurus are assigned to Nanak, though composed by different Gurus. Mohsin Fani informs us that the sixth Guru, Hargobind wrote a letter to him signed as Nanak. *Dabistan*, p. 231.

conception of Guru-ship safeguarded the distinctive position of Guru Nanak and, at the same time, bestowed upon the office of the Guru a legitimate authority for initiative. The successors of Guru Nanak were entitled to take vital decisions by virtue of their office and their decisions became an extension of Guru Nanak's mission both logically and historically."[1] It is important to note that conscious inheritance of a belief in the unity and continuity of Guru-ship also helped in eliminating the possibility of schismatic divisions and acted as an antidote whenever any divisions arose. Although the exercise of authority had been disputed by rival claimants (rival groups like Dharm alias Ram Rias were formed that contested for Guru-ship under later Gurus) from time to time, the actual form was acknowledged by all to be the personal leadership and direction of the Guru. Often some contenders to succession, claiming to be true heirs to the first Guru's authority, managed to detach segments of the Sikh community, authority resided in the person of the Guru and, for all who acknowledged him as such, the sanctified will of the Guru was beyond challenge. This authority might be delegated to deputies, but never transferred. It was a clearly defined system and in spite of the recurrent disputes caused by rival claimants, it seemed to have functioned effectively.[2] Thus the cardinal doctrine of the unity and continuity of Guru-ship and transmission of the first Guru's authority through a line of successor Gurus constituted by far the most effective source of stability, cohesion and consolidation of Sikhism.

Guru Nanak bestowed his *gaddi* i.e. the headship of the new socio-religious mission on Lehna, a Trehan Khatri of Khadur,[3] in preference to his sons. Sri Chand, the eldest son of Guru Nanak disqualified himself as a successor to his father because of his ascetic views and his brother Lakhmi Das was also rejected on similar grounds.[4] Lehna, on the other hand, became a distinguished follower of Nanak at Kartarpur and earned the reputation for single-minded devotion to his master. Spiritual qualities would command much greater importance and the succession accordingly was bestowed upon a disciple who fully imbibed the spirit of the Master's teachings as well as the pattern of community gathering initiated by Guru Nanak. When Lehna succeeded to Nanak's spiritual ministry in 1539, he became Guru Angad i.e. the part of Nanak. The self confidence of Guru Nanak's followers was ensured on psychological grounds when they felt that the leader under whose

[1]J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*, p. 292.

[2]W.H. McLeod, op. cit., p. 244.

[3]A village situated near the right bank of the Beas river approximately thirty km above its confluence with the Satluj.

[4]This is suggested and confirmed in the *Janam Sakhis*, Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 1, 38 as also in *Adi Granth*, Ramkali Var, p. 967.

guidance they were now to proceed, was the same original one whom God himself initiated. Guru Angad upheld Guru Nanak's message and mission and it is evident from the *Adi Granth* that he exhibited a strong sense of dedication and social commitment in faithfully disseminating the teachings of his master.

Although Nanak had disavowed his son on account of his ascetic inclinations and preferred Angad as his successor for his complete and implicit faith in his social mission, yet a great deal more of practical work was needed to consolidate the *panth*. The lurking danger of asceticism rather claimed serious attention of Guru Angad, partly because Sri Chand, being son of Guru Nanak, commanded great respect of all those who regarded themselves as followers of Guru Nanak. With the Indian society, as it was then constituted, asceticism had a great natural appeal and in a social situation like this it was apprehended that unless timely care was taken Sikhism might as well end as an ascetic creed. The verses of Guru Angad give evidence of the activities of Udasis[1] and the initial setback to the cohesion and spiritual organization of Sikh *panth*. His own response is of crucial importance for while in conformity with Nanak's teachings the early Gurus reacted to schism with feelings of forgiveness and humility, Guru Angad simultaneously took every possible step to ward off ascetic influences and made it clear in emphatic terms that Sikhism was essentially a religion of house-holders and was different from the Udasi faith of Baba Sri Chand, elder son of Nanak. All ascetic people were dubbed as misguided people and great emphasis was laid on leading a normal family and socially a healthy life.[2]

From the outset Sikhism stood distinguished by its reconciliation with secular life. Social commitment or involvement in the affairs of the world with a view to facing its challenges (not turning one's back) and serving the cause of family and society was an essential basis of the evolving Sikh tradition under Guru Angad. Apart from defining the distinct position of the Sikhs from the Udasis, the first successor upheld and consolidated the doctrinal boundaries of Guru Nanak's message. He alone provided a focus for continuing devotion to the memory and teachings of the *panth's* founder and the importance of Guru as an institution was firmly grasped. Thus, "They need no other instruction whom Guru Nanak has given the understanding through his guidance and who through (God's) adoration are blended with the truth."[3] For Angad the supreme guide is the master, Guru Nanak and

[1]*Adi Granth*, p. 425. Udasi is the term used for the ascetic order founded by Nanak's elder son Sri Chand.

[2]*Adi Granth*, p. 428.

[3]Ibid., Var Majh, p. 150.

for salvation one must depend upon the grace of the Guru.[1]

During the time of Guru Angad, the religious and social discipline of the *panth* followed the pattern established by Guru Nanak and it was a period of consolidation. The chief contribution made by him to the development of social mission of the Sikh movement was that he provided it with a linguistic base which facilitated the spread of Nanak's message amongst followers coming from diverse socio-ethnic background and using different dialects.

A farsighted step was taken by Guru Angad when he recorded the sayings of the Master in a special script i.e. Gurumukhi. This alphabet is generally recognised to have been invented by Guru Angad. Some dissenting views, though very few, exist. In the Rag Asa in the *Adi Granth* we come across a *patti* of 35 verses of Guru Nanak, each of which begins with a letter of the alphabet.[2] These letters, writes Ibbeston, "are exactly the same 35 as are now found in the Gurumukhi alphabet even including letter 'r' which is peculiar to Gurumukhi, thus proving that Gurumukhi alphabet existed before his time and was not invented by the second Guru Angad."[3] Devanagari and Arabic or Persian scripts were there already but they did not meet the requirements of the Punjabi language in respect of its correct writing and pronunciation. We might agree with Grierson that Landa or clipped true alphabet of Punjabi existed in the time of Guru Nanak. However, Guru Angad finding it imperfect in vowel sounds (which were frequently omitted) improved it by borrowing signs from the Devanagari alphabet and after polishing it named it Gurumukhi.[4] According to Macauliffe, "Guru Angad deeming that compositions of Guru Nanak were worthy of a special written character of their own, adopted and modified a Punjabi alphabet called Gurumukhi to give expression to what fell from the Guru's lips."[5] The step taken by Guru Angad to evolve a reformed Gurumukhi script as the sole medium of writing and instruction had far reaching consequences, and, in fact, played a remarkable role in the consolidation of the Sikh *panth*. Not only did Angad write his own compositions in the new script but he also rendered a transliteration of his Master's writings in the same character. Thus, the nucleus of the Sikh scripture shaped by Guru Angad gave a definite direction to the

[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid., Rag Asa, p. 432.

[3]Ibbeston, *Glossary of Punjab Tribes and Castes*, vol. I, p. 681. *Mirat-i Ahwal-i Jahanuma* by Ahmed Bin Muhammad Ali (1810) says that Gurumukhi was invented by Guru Angad.

[4]Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, part I, p. 624.

[5]M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, vol. II, p. 56.

Sikh faith. It gave a powerful blow to the domination of the priestly class whose importance rested on their knowledge of Sanskrit which had so far been the language of Brahminical orthodoxy. The effect felt in a generation or two was noticed by Mohsin Fani who recorded in his *Dabistan* that disciples of Nanak had no regard for Sanskrit which according to the Hindus was the language of God.[1] The distinctive linguistic base which Guru Angad provided was to have far reaching sociological and historical implications in the subsequent history of the Sikhs. When the Sikhs adopted Gurumukhi as a new literacy tradition of medium of their spoken and written dialect outside Sanskrit, it gave them a definite self identity and invariably also a feeling of individuality. This also helped to protect Sikhism from being reabsorbed back into Sanskritized Hinduism.

Leading the same social groups, as Nanak, Guru Angad could be seen as carving out the theological parameters of Sikhism, firmly holding on to legacy of Guru Nanak and, by the end of the second Guru's life time, the identity of the Nanakpanth had been clearly established. The measures adopted by the second Guru had considerably contributed to the inception of a new community and had sown seeds of some kind of consciousness among the Sikhs by giving them an individuality of their own. However, the organizational innovations and clarity of panthic definitions became more pronounced in the period of the third incumbent, Guru Amar Das.[2]

Numerous legends are current in the Sikh tradition of painstaking service of Guru Angad by Amar Das.[3] Like Nanak, Guru Angad also bestowed the Guru-ship to the best deserving candidate among his disciples bypassing the claims of his own sons. The Guru addressed a few words to Amar Das charging him with the task of onerous social responsibilities. "What Baba Nanak has said to me has ever remained steady in my mind. Herewith I impart the same mission on to you, build up the Gurmukh *panth* on the foundation of the truth."[4] Turning to the Sikhs assembled there, the Guru said, "whosoever serveth him (Amar Das) shall obtain happiness in this world and salvation in the next and he who envieth him shall have sorrow as his portion."[5] Thus, once again the necessity of dedicated devotion to the nominated Guru was emphasized.

[1]Mohsin Fani, *Dabistan-i Mazahib*, p. 233.

[2]Guru Amar Das became the Guru in 1552 and directed the affairs of the developing *panth* for 22 years till his death in 1574.

[3]Guru Angad had watched Amar Das continuously for nearly twelve years and there is again clear evidence of the careful training of a successor by the Guru presently holding the office.

[4]Sarup Das Bhalla, *Mahima Prakash*, p. 155.

[5]M.A. Macauliff, *The Sikh Religion*, vol. II, p. 44.

The third Guru Amar Das was already past seventy years of age when he assumed Guru-ship. But with a robust physique and clarity of mind at that age, he was able to give an effective leadership to the new community. He provided rudiments of a separate social organization for the Sikhs which led to the development of the *panth*'s independent identity. While sticking to the doctrinal position of Guru Nanak, his compositions, show a touch of greater practicality.

Although his hymns do not depart from the precepts of Guru Nanak, one can sense in his efforts the need to be more specific on social issues like the position of the Guru, the emphasis on the life of the householder and aversion to the caste. This indicates that he was facing new problems and trying to find their solutions. To begin with, a tendency to take the teachings of Guru Nanak a stage further can be discerned. For example, he laid maximum stress on the worship of one God, the Lord Eternal, and denounced all those who offered their allegiance to deities.[1] Thus, "My lord is eternal. He is seen by him who abideth by His words."[2] He expressed himself in singularly strong language regarding the polytheistic idolator. "Curses on the lives, curses on the habitations of those who worship strange gods—they are totally miserable when they die, their abode shall be in hell."[3] Guru Amar Das regarded the religious books such as the Vedas, Smritis and Shastras as worthy of respect but emphasized that none of them could be compared in authority to the True Guru who revealed the Divine word.[4] Guru Amar Das states the necessity of Guru's guidance with more frequency and explicitly. Thus—"All men talk of bliss but bliss can only be got by keeping the company of the Guru. It is through the grace of the Guru that eternal bliss can be known. In his mercy the Guru destroys all evil inclinations."[5] Again not the Brahmin but Guru was prescribed as the saviour. It is argued that the stress laid by Guru Amar Das on Guru was influenced by his own personal experience.[6]

However, a very significant factor was the numerical development of *panth* which pointed to the necessity of strengthening the bonds between the Guru and the Sikhs. The position of Guru as the divine saviour was getting institutionalized. Belief in charisma of the Guru,

[1]*Adi Granth*, p. 920.
[2]Ibid., p. 300.
[3]Ibid., p. 586.
[4]Ibid., p. 920.
[5]Ibid., p. 918.
[6]Before entering the service of Guru Angad, Amar Das was a staunch Vaishnava. On the last occasion he met a holy man who enquired about his *guru*, Amar Das replied he had none. The holy man regretted that he had eaten from the hands of a man who had no *guru*. Amar Das felt very disturbed and fervently prayed to God for a *guru*, which he soon found in Guru Angad.

the deeply spiritual atmosphere surrounding his congregation, and the privilege of being associated with him and to serve him, were becoming the characteristic features of the rising Sikh *panth*. Again, there was even a still stronger affirmation of the householder's life by Guru Amar Das, which may be accounted as his response to the need to give the rapidly growing *panth* more precise guidance for the way of life appropriate for a Sikh and also the need to rebut the ascetic teachings of Sri Chand, Guru Nanak's surviving son. Though he never disputed the Guru-ship of Amar Das, Sri Chand persistently argued that his life, that of an ascetic, was the proper one for a Sikh to follow. Guru Amar Das, however, authoritatively declared that "the active and householder Sikhs were wholly distinct from the passive and recluse Udasis."[1] In regard to the Udasis, the work of the fourth Guru Ram Das was perhaps more significant. He not only strove to keep his Sikhs away from ascetic tendencies but also succeeded in bridging the gulf between them and the Sikhs. Once Baba Sri Chand, the founder of the Udasi sect, called upon Guru Ram Das. Sri Chand on beholding the Guru, thought him to be the very image of Guru Nanak. In the course of conversation he referred to Guru Ram Das's unusually long beard. The Guru explained it by saying that he had grown the long beard to wipe with this the feet of holy men like him (Sri Chand). Saying this, the Guru at once proceeded to suit the action to what he had said. Sri Chand, completely taken unawares, felt abated and drawing back his feet from the Guru remarked, "O, great king, thou are senior, thou are in my father's place. It is magic like this which had made thee a Guru. I possess no such powers and therefore I was superseded. I cannot express thy greatness. The Sikhs who come to behold thee shall be saved."[2] Guru Ram Das is said to have composed the following hymn on this occasion:

> My soul is the dust of the saint's feet. The *guru* has implanted the Lord's sweet name within me and I clean the saint's feet with my hair.[3]

Perhaps Baba Sri Chand's visit and gesture of reconciliation was motivated by his desire to make the Udasi sect a part of the Sikh community but in view of the basic differences in the outlook of the two, the Udasi's belief in the cult of celibacy, asceticism and the Sikh belief in family life, it would not have been possible for Guru Ram Das to accept the proposal of merger. The Guru in fact was conscious that such a development would lead to infiltration of ascetic tendencies

[1]*Adi Granth*, p. 586.
[2]M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, vol. II, p. 257.
[3]*Adi Granth*, p. 1335.

in the Sikh faith, which by now was committed to a healthy social living.

Both *Mehma Prakash*[1] and *Suraj Prakash*[2] are replete with descriptions of various categories of people coming and holding long discussions with Guru Amar Das and Ram Das on such issues as observance of caste, performance of rituals, reading of scriptures and need for following a householder's life. Once a group of Jogis called upon Ram Das and questioned him as to why he attached no importance to the practice of *Jog* among the Sikhs. The Guru's reply to this was that "a man may wear a Jogi's garb but without devotion in his heart God will not enter it."[3] Guru explained to the Jogis the Sikh way of life, its moderation, temperence and avoidance of extreme asceticism, and its social commitment. He explained that with meditation on the Holy Name it is possible for a family man to remain detached in the midst of worldly temptations. The Guru clarified to the Jogis that "Sikhs have no desire for heaven. Their minds are immersed in God's love. That is their heaven and salvation. Thou knows not the glory of true saints. Thou has foresaken the real thing and attached thyself to false ceremonies. Without faith, no penance or worship availeth."[4] Advocating family life, the Guru said, "Men put on strange garbs and wander far away in search of God—O, man be saint in thy own home and follow the Guru's way. Practise truth, love and good works. This way alone you will know the truth and be granted God's grace."[5]

Guru Amar Das and Guru Ram Das had unreservedly accepted and worked to define the distinctive position of the Sikhs with regard to the Hindus, the Udasis (ascetics) and the Jogis. They were also aware that the community was not merely a religious fraternity but also a separate social order and as such must have its own social customs and institutions. Guru Amar Das endeavoured hard to make the Sikh position in matters of social behaviour as definite as possible. He was pained to see the practice of *sati* which was a widely prevalent social evil in those days. Guru Amar Das put the problem of *sati* in simple words, "If women appreciate their husbands they undergo sufficient pain by their death. If they appreciate not their husbands why should

[1]Sarup Das Bhalla, *Mehma Prakash.*

[2]Santokh Singh, *Suraj Prakash.*

[3]Sarup Das Bhalla, op. cit., pp. 276-80.

[4]Ibid., *Mehma Prakash* and *Suraj Prakash*, pp. 276-80, both mention that Guru on this occasion composed a hymn bearing on the matter. The hymn is in Rag Malhar in the *Adi Granth*. The opening lines are "The Ganga, the Jamuna, the Godavari, and Sarasvati make efforts to obtain the dust of saint's feet. The filth of sin which falls to us from those who are full of it is washed away by the dust of saint's feet."

[5]*Adi Granth*, p. 968.

they be burnt?" A woman has an independent personality of her own and social importance, she does not cease to be meaningful as soon as her husband died. The Guru's opposition to the burning of widows was based on this rational ground. However, he did not postulate any positive prohibition of the practice of *sati* in general. As Cunningham remarks, his was rather a mild discountenance leading the way to amendment by persuasion rather than by positive enactment.[1] The main purpose of Guru Amar Das, in fact, was to discountenance the infiltration of the custom of *sati* into the Sikh society. His message was really meant for his own disciples who would naturally attach great weight to such persuasion by the Guru. The Hindu orthodoxy was already agitated over innovatory practices of the Sikhs and the Guru could hardly expect them to respond to his exhortation against a deeply rooted socio-religious system.

Slowly but steadily the gulf between the Hindus and Sikh social life was widening. A considerable deviation from Hindu marriage ceremony was made when Guru Amar Das introduced the Sikh marriage i.e. Anand Karaj with the celebration of wedding of his daughter Bibi Bhani with Bhai Ram Das. *Anand*[2] *Sabad* of Guru Amar Das was sung while Bibi Bhani and Bhai Ram Das performed the perambulation around Guru Amar Das.[3] Guru Ram Das is said to have composed the following hymn for the marriage: "The Lord has accomplished the work, he has come to wed a holy bride. He has come to wed a holy bride who thus found God, that bride is dear to her spouse. On meeting the saints, songs of rejoicing are sung. God himself has decorated the bride; the deities, men and heavenly minstrels have come in a body and formed wonderful marriage procession."[4] The composition of a new nuptial song which replaced the traditional scriptural texts in connection with the most important ceremony in a householder's life was a significant event reflecting the new and separate identity of the Sikh *panth*.

Guru Amar Das struck at the roots of yet another long established custom of popular Hinduism, when he instructed his son as to the

[1]J.D. Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs*, p. 50.

[2]*Anand* is a very significant composition of Guru Amar Das. It is written in the Rag Ramkali in *Adi Granth*, pp. 917-22. Total number of Pauris are 40 out of which 38 are by Amar Das and one each by Ram Das and Guru Arjun. The composition is now recited on the occasion of marriage, and the ceremony is also known as Anand Karaj. It is also sung on other occasions of rejoicings.

[3]Giani Gurucharan Singh Khalsa, *Gurmat Rehat Maryada*, p. 122. The *lavan* were added subsequently by Guru Ram Das as part of Sikh marriage ceremony. For *lavan* see *Adi Granth*, p. 773, Guru Ram Das also composed two hymns entitled *Ghorian* in Rag Wadhans to be sung on marriage occasion, see *Adi Granth*, p. 578.

[4]*Adi Granth*, p. 775.

nature of rites to be performed after his death. *Mehma Prakash* gives a specific account on this point.[1] "The Guru told his son not to perform any traditional rituals and to immerse his mortal remains in the Ganga. The Guru not only forbade the usual Hindu obsequies but also mentioned what kind of rites he would like to be performed after him. Thus the Guru spoke, "After my death sing God's praises. Call God instead of a *pandit* and for the *Garar Purana* read God's words. Read God's words, hear God's name, the Guru desires God's love not a lofty bier, barely rolls, bread on leaves, Hindu obsequies performth not."[2]

All these ritual practices were performed by orthodox Brahmins who in fact wielded considerable influence in social life. Guru Amar Das outrightly rejected all the rituals of Brahminical order and even ruled out the mournings that go with death.[3] The changes that he desired to introduce in the very important ceremonies connected with marriage and death struck at the root of influence of the priestly class and though in such matters when long standing instances and cherished practices were concerned, success must necessarily have been slow, the ball had been set rolling and Sikhism put on the way of gradual disassociation from Hinduism and its consolidation into a separate sect.[4] The social innovations introduced by the Gurus show their concern not merely to provide social cohesion to their followers but also their desire to liberate their faith from cultural and ritualistic accretions of Hinduism, and which would mark them out as neither Hindus nor Muslims. Bhai Gurdas set a number of obligations to highlight the separate social identity of the Sikhs. Thus, "the Guru's *panth* is distinct and cannot be mixed with others."[5] "Auspicious days, seasons, astrology, predicting the future with long spells be ignored by the Sikhs."[6] "Birth rituals, shaving the tuft of hair, using cow's urine, betrothal and death ceremonies are meaningless."[7] "Pilgrimages and auspicious days are forbidden for the Sikhs who should celebrate *gurpurbs* instead."[8] Considered by themselves these regulations found in the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas might simply seem to be negative criticism of Hinduism and an attempt to express that the Sikhs are different from Hindus. It is only when these statements are studied in the light of social dimensions

[1]Sarup Das Bhalla, *Mehma Prakash*, p. 268.

[2]*Adi Granth*, p. 923.

[3]Professional mourning (by women of barber caste) was not to be permitted at Sikh funerals, instead true comfort should be sought in Lord's home. See Bhai Gurdas *Var* 5, Pauri 14.

[4]Indubhushan Banerjee, *Evolution of the Khalsa*, vol. II, p. 182.

[5]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 3, Pauri 5.

[6]Ibid., *Var* 5, p. 8.

[7]Ibid., p. 9.

[8]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 7, Pauri 13.

of Sikhism under the first four successor Gurus that they can be seen as parts of a well considered policy to rid Sikhism of the adumberated conventionalism and orthodox rituals of Hinduism. Another purpose of this policy was to present the Sikh *panth* as a community open to everyone who believed in one supreme Nirguna God and free from what the Bhaktas and Sufis regarded as superstition. Lest the Brahminical influences should reassert over the nascent Sikh community, the successor Gurus endeavoured hard to make the Sikh position in matters of religious belief and social behaviour as definite as possible. But what is more important to take note is that in several matters, for instance, in respect of social customs, marriage and death rites, religious rituals and pilgrimages, they outrightly rejected the elaborate social code of Brahminical Hinduism and replaced it by much simpler and much less costlier social ritual.[1]

The Sikh Gurus were critical of the social evils amongst the Hindus and through their writings and discourses the Gurus also tried to impress upon their followers the urgency of a clear understanding of the difference between Sikhism and orthodox Hinduism. They took a series of steps and formulated policies to build and shape their followers into a distinct community with a separate socio-religious ethos.

A follower of Guru who observed distinct social rituals could carry his religious identity into the most fundamental movements of life and by doing so buttress the distinctive status of the Sikh community.

It was largely due to clarity of *panthic* definitions and conscious dedicated involvement of Guru Amar Das that the message and mission of Guru Nanak was daily gaining in numerical strength and the Sikh records narrate how by active preaching and propagation the Guru increased the votaries of the new faith. Bhai Gurdas testifies to the increased influence and popularity of Guru's power and position at Goindwal.[2] The numerical and geographical extension of the Sikh *panth* pointed towards the urgency of evolving an organizational network that would sustain the *panth's* coherence. A major contribution of Guru Amar Das in this direction was the introduction of what is known as the *manji* system, an ecclesiastical organization whereby a great step was taken in the process of giving the Sikhs a religious administration of their own. The word *manji* literally signifies a cot or *charpoy*, a common Indian bed. But here it denotes a responsible

[1]For a detailed reference for marriage and death rites and other ceremonies refer to W.O. Cole and P.S. Sahbhi, *The Sikhs, Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*; Harjot S. Uberoi, "A World Reconstructed, Religious Ritual and Community among the Sikhs, 1850-1901" Ph.D. dissertation, Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University, Canberra, 1987.

[2]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 11, Pauri 16.

religious position conferred by the Guru upon pre-eminent devotees of his, a seat of delegated authority. The term is said to have derived its sacred connotation from the fact that Gurus used to sit on *manji* while imparting instructions to their audiences. Teja Singh[1] traces the origin of *manjis* to Guru Nanak. While it is true that the Guru had set up distant *sangats* but to impart the nomenclature of *manjis* to *sangats* of Guru Nanak does not seem to be really accurate. In the *Janam Sakhis* and utterances of Guru Nanak there is no reference, implicit or explicit, to the subject of *manjis*. It was only during the third Guru that the Sikhs had grown rapidly in numbers and Guru Amar Das found it necessary to devise means for administering to the local needs of his distant followers. It was now impossible for the Guru to offer instructions to all the followers in person and the *sangat* or Sikh congregation that daily met around him no longer sufficed. Hence he nominated some of the prominent Sikhs for the purpose of preaching Sikhism to congregations situated away from the centre.

Different opinions have been expressed by modern scholars about the nature of the *manjis* created by Guru Amar Das. Indubhushan Banerjee describes the *manjis* as spiritual bishoprics.[2] Macauliffe writes, "As the Emperor Akbar administered his empire by agency of governors of provinces, so Guru Amar Das similarly partitioned the Sikh spiritual empire into twenty-two districts."[3] Kirpal Singh Narang designates them as provinces or bishoprics.[4] Teja Singh calls the *manjis* by the name of dioceses.[5] These scholars seem to convey the common impression that *manji* was some sort of territorial unit. But it is important to note that none of the Sikh writers before the close of the nineteenth century ever tried to impart a territorial sense to it. The importance given to the *manjis* was invariably spiritual rather than territorial or temporal.[6] Giani Singh, the author of *Panth Prakash*, refers in some detail to the grant of *manjis* by Guru Amar Das to Bhai Nanak Chand Handal and Gangu Shah. In each case the grant is shown as a reward

[1]Teja Singh, *Sikhism—Its Ideals and Institutions*, p. 90.
[2]Indubhushan Banerjee, op. cit., I, p. 151.
[3]M.A. Macauliffe, op. cit., p. 151.
[4]K.S. Narang, *History of Punjab*.
[5]Teja Singh, op. cit., p. 42.
[6]It is often said that Guru Amar Das created twenty-two provinces on the pattern of Akbar's empire. This cannot be regarded valid for two reasons. First, the Mughal empire under Akbar never had twenty-two provinces. The number of provinces was 12 and by the end of Akbar's rule with the conquest of Deccan it was 15. The *manjis* were created by Amar Das gradually not simultaneously, the question of their being territorial administrative units equal to Mughal provinces does not arise.

for selfless and devoted service rendered by the devotees. The earliest sources such as Sarup Das Bhalla's *Mehma Prakash* and records at Gurdwara Haveli Sahib give us the list of *manjis* but do not, in any way, refer to *manjis* as territorial units but as missionary orders. It may well be inferred that the *manji* system was not a territorial division but a missionary order for the propagation and consolidation of the Sikh *panth* in the areas away from the Guru's headquarters. Only men of piety and sterling integrity were awarded the distinction of holding the *manjis*. They were supposed to understand the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. They conducted their missionary work individually and also through congregations. They could move about in the country as they wished and it was not necessary that the holder of a *manji* would always be staying at his native place, nor was his position hereditary. *Manjis* were conferred upon eminent devotees for their high spiritual and social attainments and not upon their families. However, since hereditary tendency is strongly rooted in human nature, in certain cases, as for instance, in the case of Sawanmal, the *manji* tradition became hereditary.[1]

Guru Amar Das's decision to divide the Sikhs into twenty-two *manjis*, women being not excluded, represents a decisive phase in missionary activity and organization of the Sikh *panth*. As they carried on their missionary work, more and more people fell under the spell of Sikhism. With the passing of years the ranks of Sikhism expanded enormously and it began to be felt that a certain occasion in the year should be earmarked when the followers of Gurus could assemble at a central place and enable the *manjis* to maintain a continued liaison with the centre at Goindwal. The idea was first mooted by Bhai Paro who, accompanied by a large deputation of Sikhs, submitted it to the Guru and the latter welcomed the suggestion because he himself had been thinking on similar lines. According to *Mehma Prakash*,[2] Paro had said to the Guru: "O benefactor of the lowly, if it meets your approval, a day in the year may be fixed when all Sikhs could assemble for the Guru's *sangat*. By dint of that they would swim across the ocean of the world and also have their bonds of love strengthened between themselves." To this the Guru replied: "What you have thought is already in my mind. All should come on the day of Baisakhi. Send letters to the Sikhs, on learning this all will come in promotion of love and devotion."[3]

[1]Dr B.S. Gill writes in his work on Amar Das that he had the occasion to meet Mahant on Gaddi of Sawan Mal in Batala. This shows that *manji* of Bhai Sawan Mal became hereditary after his death.

[2]Sarup Das, *Mehma Prakash*, p. 132.

[3]Ibid., pp. 132, 133.

The instructions of the Guru were implemented with promptness and when the next Baisakhi came, Goindwal assumed the festive look of a large fair. The success of the first Bisowa Divas, as it was termed, was a great success and it was decided to have an annual gathering on Diwali also. The reason for summoning the Sikhs together at festival times had been to strengthen the cohesion of the *panth* and they were in all probability intended to strengthen the loyalty of the Sikhs to the Guru. The biannual gatherings on Baisakhi and Diwali were extremely beneficial for the spread of Sikhism. Some of the noteworthy features of these gatherings were: (1) they were a very effective means of demarcating the Sikhs from the rest of the Hindus and coming to these gatherings the Sikhs felt conscious of the larger fraternity; (2) during the festival gatherings the Gurus reiterated and propagated the distinctiveness of Guru Nanak's message on different aspects of sacred and secular life; (3) the festival gatherings were also important in so far as they provided a wider economic perspective in arranging and supervision of different aspects of socio-economic life such as procuring and distribution of different commodities for the consumption of the visiting followers at the *langar* i.e., community kitchen; and (4) during the festivals, bazars were organized where the Sikh followers brought their products from different parts and sold them at reasonable prices at the headquarters of Guru in Punjab; (5) the corporate character of the faith was emphasized by common deliberations leading to common actions and at the biannual festive gatherings, the Sikhs were provided with ample opportunities of coming in contact with and fraternizing with one another and this strengthened bonds of cohesion among them.

The number of the Sikhs grew immensely as a result of the activities of the *manjis* and the annual gatherings. There was a steady multiplication of missionary and institutional framework and by the time of Guru Arjun there was a network of *sangats* not only throughout the Majha tract, but they had also spread over far beyond the boundary of Punjab. Though Sikhism was being strengthened within Punjab through the seasonal gatherings at the time of Baisakhi and Diwali at the seat of the Guru in the Punjab, Sikhs were also linked more intensively and quickly throughout India through the distant *sangats*. Bhai Gurdas gives us a list of more important *sangats*.[1] Mohsin Fani also says: "The number of *sangats* increased everywhere so that in the time of Arjunmal, it became very considerable and at last there was no place in the country where Sikhs were not found."[2] The discovery of a few

[1]Bhai Gurdas's account of the Sikh *sangats* clearly shows how Sikhism had widely spread by his time. Among others he mentions Sikh *sangats* at Sultanpur, Lahore, Kasur, Kashmir, Thaneshwar, Delhi, Agra etc. Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 2, Pauris 14, 31.

[2]Mohsin Fani, op. cit., p. 278.

letters and manuscripts at Dacca has clearly established that by the year 1666 prosperous *sangats* flourished at Sialkot, Chitagaon, Sondip and Lashkar besides the one at Sultanpur or Sangattala quarter of Dacca and that, by the time of Guru Gobind Singh, Dacca had earned the title of "home of Sikhism."[1]

Though some of these *sangats* were set up subsequent to the days of Guru Arjun, they unmistakably show that the *sangats* had become a vital part of Sikhism. Wherever a Sikh might be, he was brought under a *sangat* and through it made to realise that a Sikh was not only to look to his own individual needs but also to shoulder his responsibilities as part of the corporate body of the *panth*. Enormous projects like excavation of tanks, setting up of new centres, considerably increased the financial liability of the Sikhs. A change seems to have been made during the days of Guru Ram Das who is said to have sent agents throughout the country for purpose of collecting contributions from his followers for the excavation of the tanks he had planned. But as yet the contributions were absolutely voluntary and often, due to expansion of Sikhism, the contributions did not find their way into the treasury of the Gurus. It can be seen that a change in the method of collection had become necessary. What Guru Arjun did in this connection was to order that in future every Sikh was to set aside *dasvandh* or one-tenth of his income for the Guru's fund and to remit it through an accredited *masand*[2] who was to come regularly every year at Baisakhi with a *sangat* and to present his collections to the Guru in person. Thus an arrangement, originally an extension of the fourth Guru's drive for collection of funds for Amritsar, became permanent and provided for Guru Arjun a continuous flow of money for the central treasury. This development too had far reaching consequences.

It is important to note that *masands* were appointed not to replace the *manjis* set up by Guru Amar Das, rather they were to supplement them in their missionary work particularly in collection of funds. Thus Guru Arjun reinvigorated and expanded the system already in existence and though there was a corresponding increase in the responsibility of *masands*, it was the general rule for them not to depend in any way on the offerings for their own subsistence, the principle being not to pollute the body.[3] It was expected that a *masand* should earn his living by engaging himself in some sort of remunerative occupation. At least for several decades the system worked well and the Guru's control

[1]See "Sikh Relics in Eastern Bengal", *Dacca Review*, 1916, p. 225.

[2]The word *masand* is the corrupted form of *Masand-i-Ali* meaning high officials. Preachers being representatives of the Guru were offered higher seats in congregations, therefore, they were called *masands*.

[3]Teja Singh has very emphatically discussed this aspect of Guru's teaching. See *Growth of Responsibility in Siknism*, p. 29-32.

over the entire Sikh organization through his *sangats* and *masands* ensured the solidarity of the faith as also a steady flow of resources to the Guru's treasury. It was through the unstinted support of the *sangats* and funds arranged by the *masands* that Guru Arjun could establish towns like Sri Hargobindpur, Taran Taran, Kartarpur and could complete the lofty project of building Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar.

The organization of the *manjis* had remarkably contributed towards the development of the Sikh religion and the Sikh community. The setting of *masands* too went a long way in strengthening economic foundations of the Sikh *panth* and in carrying on the work of propaganda in different parts of country. As Mohsin Fani informs us, "The *masands* of Guru not only gathered funds from the Sikhs away from the centre, but also propagated the religion of Guru Nanak."[1] The Gurus kept constant touch with their *sangats* and *masands*, often inviting them to their headquarters. It should not, however, be supposed that the *sangats* lived in complete isolation from each other or from the community's principal centre of activity. Pilgrimage had been a regular feature of Sikhs since at least the time of Guru Amar Das (1552-74) and in fact right from the time of Guru Nanak visits to the Guru were a source of joy for many and an obligation for all those who could reasonably make them. The fraternization continually provided by such pilgrimages ensured close-knit evolution of the Sikh community. Notwithstanding the rapid multiplication of the *sangats*, the Guru continued to be the central unifying personality. While Guru Nanak was present, *darshan* could be obtained by visiting him in Kartarpur or by meeting him during the course of one of his journeys. The same purpose might be achieved by appearing before one of the successor Gurus but as the community grew in numbers and in geographical distribution,[2] such personal visits became increasingly difficult and the more distant *sangats* prompted the idea of Guru's presence within local congregation. There was a growing identification between the Guru and the *sangats* and they began to acquire a great sanctity. Bhai Gurdas said, "One disciple is a single Sikh, two form a holy association but where there are five present, there is God himself."[3] The individual Sikh and the *sangat* were both given an increasing importance by the Gurus during the sixteenth century. In the *bani* of Guru Ram Das, the devotees of God are the best people (*uttam*), the true Guru is among the Sikhs and the

[1]Mohsin Fani, op. cit., p. 233.

[2]There is also evidence pointing to the early establishment of *sangat* in South India by Bhatra Sikhs. W.H. McLeod, Hakikat Rah Mukan Raja Sivanaphki, in F.S. Bajwa, ed., Papers on Guru Nanak, *Proceedings of the Punjab History Congress*, fourth session, 1969, pp 96-7, 101-2.

[3]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 3, Pauri 11.

sangat is dear to God. It was generally believed that the prayers offered by a Sikh congregation found a sure response from God. In time to come, a divine character came to be attributed to the collective body of the *sangat* which became sacrosanct and authoritative for the individual members of the congregation.[1]

From the very beginning the institution of the *sangat* was integrally associated with that of *langar* or community mess. Guru Angad tried to popularize the mission of Guru Nanak by keeping alive the tradition of *langar*. Apart from forging bonds of solidarity among the newly carved out brotherhood, the *langar*, it was hoped, would help in the propaganda work. The *langar* was to be maintained with combined contributions of the community and taught the Sikhs the first lesson of corporate liability. As members of the community, they were made to realize their social obligations, and the ideal of service in the *langar* became closely linked with the concept of the Sikh brotherhood. While ideals of service and brotherhood were inculcated by other medieval religious movements as well, it is, however, only in Sikhism that a definite sense of corporate responsibility gradually evolved. According to Malcolm, "a Sikh was told that whatever he received from God, it was his duty to share it with others because the provision belonged to the Guru and the service in the *langar* was the privilege of every Sikh."[2] Every Sikh was expected to contribute to *langar* by donating in cash or kind or by participating in the preparation and distribution of the food prepared. Guru Angad's wife Khivi took active interest in the running of the *langar* and supplied delicious dishes like rice prepared in milk (*kheer*) and ghee.[3] Guru himself, however, lived on coarse food earned by him by twisting the strings of *manjis*.

Guru Amar Das consolidated the *langar*, for he realized its tremendous significance not only as a matter of necessity for feeding those who came to see him but also as a useful vehicle of social reform, the basic principle being to foster a spirit of egalitarianism since all were required to sit together in common rows for partaking food in the *langar*. The increased activity of *langar* under Guru Amar Das clearly shows that the Sikh movement had gained in strength and popularity. Akbar's visit and partaking of food in the *langar* is illustrative of universal application of the principle of commensality.

[1]Of his close identification with the *sangat* Guru Gobind provided a unique example at the initiation ceremony of Khalsa in which the supreme head of a religious organisation voluntarily surrendered his authority to the disciples in the *sangat* and he adopted the unusual procedure of being baptized by the same disciples who a short-while ago were baptized by him.

[2]J. Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, p. 185.

[3]*Adi Granth*, p. 960.

The organization of the community kitchen involved several interrelated functions such as procurement of supplies which were generally provided by voluntary contributions of the Sikhs and sometimes had to be purchased from the market. The bards Satta and Balwand have testified to the fact that some of the best food stuffs were provided in the *langar*. "Ever in your kitchen, Guru Amar Das, are available clarified butter and refined wheat flour."[1] The free kitchen remained open till late night and nothing was saved for the next day. *Langar* was not only meant to promote the feelings of brotherhood and social equality but also to remove the taboos about *chauka*, the preparation of food in specially washed and plastered enclosures, as had been advocated and upheld by Brahminical orthodoxy. The Guru rejected the myth about impurity. Guru Amar Das says: "May I never forget the true Name. Then there can be no pollution through touch of cooking squares. Without the Name all cooking squares are impure. Because God alone is pure."[2] *Langar* continued to be strengthened by the fourth and fifth Gurus and demolished the caste barriers and became a means of social cohesion and integration. Ever since its inception it provided avenues for service (*seva*) and it was a practical demonstration of equality, hospitality and love for fellow beings and remains to this day a distinctive feature of the Sikh way of social life.

Social cohesion and bonds of solidarity among the Sikh followers were not only fostered through the twin institutions of *sangat* and *langar* but also further buttressed when the Sikh Gurus provided new centres for pilgrimage. A significant step in this direction was taken by Guru Amar Das with the construction of a *baoli* at Goindwal. The Sikh chroniclers frequently mention that *baoli* originated as a centre of pilgrimage. For instance, Sarup Das Bhalla[3] writes, "Satguru, the protector of *dharma* and doer of good, revealing the *baoli tirath* promoted welfare of all." He also states that if a person makes eighty-four recitations of Japji, the famous composition of Guru Nanak, at each step of *baoli*, that person will attain emancipation from the cycle of 84 lakhs of *junas* (existences).[4] The clear implication being that *baoli* at Goindwal was constructed not merely as a source of drinking water but as a pilgrim centre as well. A question arises that if the Sikh theoretical position was opposed to *tiraths*, then why Guru Amar Das created a Sikh pilgrimage at Goindwal. McLeod writes, "If we set this new well against the teachings of Guru Nanak, we find an apparent contradiction. Guru Nanak, with all the characteristic *sant* emphasis

[1]Ibid., p. 968.
[2]Ibid., p. 1090.
[3]Sarup Das, *Mehma Prakash*, p. 158.
[4]Ibid., pp. 159-60.

upon interiority, had declared in very plain terms that there was only one *tirath*, only one pilgrimage centre for the true devotee and that was within his own heart. All others were useless. Here, however, we find his second successor apparently inaugurating the very thing he had spurned."[1] On similar lines Owen Cole states, "The establishment of *baoli*, as Sikhs call it, was a departure from strict principles of Guru Nanak. It apparently contradicts Guru Amar Das's own warning that self-will cannot be washed away at holy places no matter how many one may visit.[2] However, it seems difficult to accept the views that building the *baoli* at Goindwal by the third Guru was a deviation from the teachings of Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak had laid stress on inner purity and he says in this context, "Impurity of the egoist is not washed off even though a hundred *tiraths* may be performed."[3] Guru Amar Das also spoke of the futility of performing pilgrimages and in accordance with the spirit of Nanak, Guru Amar Das states: "He whose heart is in the filth of sin may wander in pilgrimages through the countries of the world. Yet O Nanak it is only when he associates with 'True Name' that he shall cross the ocean."[4] The main purpose of creating a *baoli* at Goindwal was to set up a Sikh centre where teachings of the Guru could be disseminated and this new centre would have none of the ritualism and formalism peculiar to Hindu pilgrimage. There is a strong element of distinction between the two. The Sikh pilgrimage centre is in Goindwal and not at Hardwar or Kurukshetra. By giving the followers a bathing tank of their own, the Guru was aiming at discouraging his followers from engaging in practices found at Hindu pilgrimage centres and to prevent them from indulging in such practices as offering of prayers on behalf of ancestors, the employment of priests and casting of horoscopes etc. Sarup Das gives an anecdote which throws significant light on this point. Once a large group of people were going to Hardwar for holy bath in the Ganga. On the way, they passed through Goindwal and met the Guru. The Guru addressed them not to make arduous journey but to have a dip in the *baoli* which too had the Ganga water. One of them actually had a dip in the *baoli* but he did not want to violate his resolve and resumed his journey along with other members of the group. As he was leaving Goindwal, the Guru asked him to bring for him some Ganga water. After his bath in the Ganga, when he was trying to fill his jug with the holy water the vessel slipped suddenly out of his hand and was sunk. On his way back at Goindwal he waited upon the Guru and told him

[1]W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, p. 83.
[2]W. Owen Cole, *Sikhism and Its Indian Context*, p. 260.
[3]*Adi Granth*, p. 399.
[4]Ibid., p. 93.

what had happened to his vessel at Hardwar. The Guru informed him that his vessel had come into the *baoli* and asked him to get down to the place where he could find it. He acted as he was instructed and to his great surprise recovered his lost jug from there. Thereupon he begged the Guru's forgiveness for not obeying him on the earlier occasion to have holy bath at the *baoli* of Goindwal.

How authentic is this piece of information about the Guru performing a miracle, we cannot assure and the account of Sarup may not be taken at its face value. Nevertheless, it indicates the desire of the Guru to discourage his followers from going to Hardwar for pilgrimage and perform pilgrimage to Goindwal instead. In fact, the establishment of *baoli* at Goindwal, if examined on more rational grounds, it can well be taken as a populist measure by a leader who was facing problems of organizing a new faith. As the *panth* was growing and a second generation coming up, the bonds of personal commitment to faith were not sufficient. The need for bonds other than that of mere religious belief were becoming important and also the necessity of forging new institutions to cope with the new situations. To cope up with the emotional and sociological needs of their growing followers on the one hand and the need to strengthen social cohesion in the new social order on the other, the Sikh Gurus at times had to make compromises with their initial radicalism on many issues. Since old habits die hard and the feeling of performing pilgrimages continued to have hold on people the Guru had to satisfy the aspirations of his followers. The idea that a dip in the *baoli* at Goindwal was an equally meritorious act as going to Hardwar, could discourage the Sikhs from going there and, at the same time, satisfy a psychological need born out of their conditioning of ages. In this context, the step taken by Guru Amar Das may not be seen as a conscious shift in doctrine, because the emphasis and insistence was still on salvation through inward meditation and divine name. Moreover, setting of the Sikh pilgrimage centre at Goindwal also provided another bond of cohesion and soon the *baoli* became a convenient centre for propagation of the Sikh teachings.

In fact, a great impetus was imparted to the expansion and popularity of the Sikh faith when the Sikh Gurus set up new centres for their activity which were popularized among their followers as places of pilgrimage. Each of the successor Gurus after Nanak left the place of his predecessor. Guru Angad left Kartarpur and made Khadur (in Amritsar) his headquarters where he regularly disseminated religious and social ideals of Guru Nanak. Guru Amar Das made Goindwal his seat of functioning and brought into the orbit of Sikh faith many converts. Construction of *baoli* at Goindwal gave a new dimension to the Sikh organization and as the popularity of Goindwal increased due to annual gatherings and it being a popular centre of Sikh pilgrimage,

the urgency of setting up another centre was recognized. Guru Amar Das instructed Guru Ram Das (then Bhai Jetha) to select land for the new Sikh centre. Ram Das set out in the Majha region in search of the desired site.[1] Ultimately, he discovered an open uninhabited stretch of land some twenty miles from Goindwal. According to *Mehma Prakash*,[2] the site had earlier been sanctified by a visit of Guru Nanak.[3] Also attached to it was an old legend which confirms the holy character of the place. The persistent local tradition highlighting the medicinal properties of the water of the pond is the story of Rajni, daughter of Rai Duni Chand, a Kardar (revenue collector) of Patti and the subsequent cure of her leprous husband after taking a dip into the pond.[4]

It is said that Ram Das visited the place in connection with the above episode and was so impressed with the beauty of the site that he decided to set up a place of pilgrimage here. Dr Fauja Singh has highlighted the geographical situation of the selected site which might not have been absent from the Guru's mind. This was its location on important routes with connection to the Grand Trunk Road of those days, passing through Goindwal, with the northern route running its course along the sub-mountain line of the Himalayas. As such the new site occupied a strategic geographical position holding vast potentialities of a bright future.[5]

Thus the new centre was founded on an open uninhabited piece of land at a distance of twenty-five miles from Goindwal, surrounded by the villages of Sultanwind, Tung, Gumara and Gilwadi, all at that time in the Pargana of Jhabbal in the taluka of Patti which formed a part of the suba of Lahore of the Mughal empire. The issue of the acquisition of the land by the Sikh Gurus has been described differently by different sources of local Sikh traditions. There is a well entrenched Sikh belief (though there is no corroboration of it in contemporary Persian sources) that when Akbar visited Goindwal and met Guru Amar Das, he offered a jagir for the maintenance of the Guru's *langar*. The offer was politely declined by the Guru on the ground that the *langar* was best run by God's grace and voluntary offerings of the Sikhs. Then it is said that the Emperor made the offer to Guru's

[1]Sarup Das Bhalla, op.cit., p. 289.

[2]Ibid., p. 291.

[3]Giani Gian Singh, *Twarikh-i Gur Khalsa*, p. 343.

[4]The earliest reference to miraculous properties of the water of this pond is found in a symbolic form in *bani* of Guru Ram Das in *Guru Granth Sahib*, Rag Gauri, Mahalla 4, p. 1193; also see Kesar Singh Chibbar, *Bansavalinama*, p. 23.

[5]Fauja Singh, ed., *The City of Amritsar*, p. 17. The expectations entertained turned out to be well founded because later on the place became so important that Grand Trunk had to be rerouted so as to pass through Amritsar.

daughter Bibi Bhani (Ram Das's wife) which was accepted.[1] According to another version, the land was purchased by the Guru on payment of Rs. 700 from the zamindar of the village Tung at the instance of Emperor Akbar[2] or presented by the people of the village Sultanwind out of regard and reverence for the Guru.[3] There is no documentary evidence to support or contradict these views. But the version regarding the purchase of the land by Guru Ram Das is in keeping with the tradition of the Sikh Gurus who never took any land grants from the rulers. Opinions may vary on the question of acquisition of the site but it is certain that the selection of the site was planned and not accidental.

The site having been finally selected for the new holy centre of Amritsar, Bhai Jetha (later he became the fourth Guru Ram Das) was instructed to commence the project with the excavation of a holy tank. Some intelligent, experienced and devout Sikhs like Bhai Budha, Bhai Gurdas were instructed to assist Ram Das to implement the project.[4] The Sikhs were emotionally involved in the work and a large part of Sikh *sangats* from nearby areas came to the site to render their voluntary services.[5] In a few years' time, a new township sprang up in the vicinity of the tank under excavation. The new township was first called Chak Guru Ram Das. Later it came to be known as Ramdaspur and finally as Amritsar, the name it acquired after the name of the tank i.e., Amritsarovar (holy tank). To ensure the security of life and business, Ram Das not only erected a wall around the new city but also built his own residence in the vicinity.[6]

The construction of both the tank and town was complete in 1577 during the time of Guru Ram Das. On completion of the projects the Guru called the Khatris,[7] and told them to take charge of the holy

[1]Kesar Singh Chibbar, op. cit., p. 35. Sohan Singh Kavi, *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin,* ed. Giani Inder Singh Gill, p. 22, Sarup Das Bhalla, op. cit., p. 175.

[2]*Amritsar District Gazetteer*, 1914, p. 13.

[3]Santokh Singh, op. cit., p. 1689. Giani Gian Singh, *Twarikh-i Gurkhalsa*, 1970, p. 343.

[4]Santokh Singh, op. cit., p. 1688.

[5]Ibid., p. 1689.

[6]Kesar Singh Chibbar, op. cit., p. 39.

[7]Though the Sikh community incorporated a broad spectrum of diverse castes, the Khatris however, enjoyed a particular prominence. The Gurus were all Khatri, but the Khatri influence in the *panth* was not limited to the authority of the Guru but it extended much further within the community. Social status, education and prosperity served as strong qualifications. Moreover it were the Khatris who had shown considerable adaptability in adjusting to Muslim rule and had demonstrated administrative skill. Again it were the Khatris who provided a requisite leadership which under the guidance of the Gurus helped in the consolidation of the Sikh movement. In terms of status the Khatris still occupy an elevated position in Punjab society. For an interesting description of Khatris see Prakash Tandon, *Punjabi Century*, especially, ch. 5.

place but then Khatris humbly pleaded their inability to perform religious duties and sought instead the blessings of the Guru for *kirt* and *barkat* (blessings in their professions).[1] Their practical knowledge of the affairs of the world and their organizing ability greatly helped in strengthening and expanding the Sikh movement.

There was great jubilation in the Sikh *sangat* over the completion of the lofty project. Guru Ram Das composed beautiful verses in glorification of the *sarovar* making an injunction upon his followers to take bath in the holy tank and meditate on the Name of God. Guru Arjun subsequently made this tank pucca and the Sikhs showed great devotion in so far as hundreds of volunteers, masons and labourers came for free service when its side stairs were bricked. The popularity of the tank acquired a charismatic sanctity and Amritsar became the headquarters of the religious activities of the Sikhs. Guru Arjun highlights the unique benefits gained therefrom.[2] Thus he states, "I have seen all places but there is none like this. The creator himself has established it and hence it is beautiful."[3] Again, "O saints, beautiful is the tank of Ram Das. Blessed is the earth and bounteous the tank which contains nectar like water; whosoever bathes therein his descendants are saved and his own soul is blessed."[4] The tank was named Amar Sarovar or Amritsar. Gradually the fame of the sacred tank led to its identity with the latter application and the city got its final name Amritsar. Coming to Sikh centres of pilgrimage at Goindwal and Amritsar the Sikhs became increasingly conscious of the larger fraternity.

Guru Arjun weaned his followers still; further from the Hindu sacred places by giving a 'Mecca' to the Sikhs, he added to the sanctity and splendour of Amritsar by not only making it a flourishing commercial city and his headquarters but also by building the beautiful Harmandir or the Temple of God in the middle of the great tank and this temple was calculated to become the central place of worship for the Sikhs.[5] The plan of Harmandir was conceived and executed by Guru Arjun. He was assisted by Bhai Budha, Bhai Gurdas and some other prominent Sikhs. According to an early Sikh tradition, the foundation of Harmandir was laid by Guru Arjun himself. However, a later but commonly accepted tradition is that the foundation of the temple was laid at the request of Guru Arjun by a Muslim *pir*, Mian Mir of Lahore, in 1645 VS/AD 1588.[6]

[1]Kesar Singh, op. cit., p. 39.
[2]*Adi Granth*, p. 623.
[3]Ibid., p. 1362.
[4]Ibid., p. 783.
[5]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 36; Santokh Singh, *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*, p. 1855.
[6]*Tawarikh-i Gurkhalsa*, p. 347; *Punjab Notes and Queries*, vol. I, p. 141.

The construction work of the temple commenced with great enthusiasm. The names of devout Sikhs associated with the undertaking became legends and adorn the annals of the Sikh *panth*. Instead of building the Harmandir on a higher level as was the custom of traditional Hindu architecture, the temple was built on a lower level than its surrounding ground so that the visitors would have to go down the steps in order to pay homage to the holy shrine. A bridge connecting the temple with Darshan Deori (entrance gate) was constructed over the support of *surang dwaris* (acqueducts), *mehrabs* and *dats* (arches). The other distinguishing feature of the structure of the Harmandir was that unlike the Hindu temples which usually have one gate, the Harmandir was made open on all four sides representing open entry to all irrespective of caste and creed.

With the construction of the Harmandir and the growth of the town around it, the Sikhs were enabled to rally at a central place of worship where the tank, the temple and the Guru would foster psychological integration amongst them. The local Sikhs visited the temple daily, those of the nearby areas did so frequently and of distant places twice a year on the occasion of Baisakhi and Diwali. Soon Harmandir became the principal place of worship unparalleled in beauty and glory. The crowds visiting Harmandir[1] in Amritsar were swelled by the sanctity it assumed by becoming the 'Mecca of the Sikhs'. In the words of Guru Arjan:

> I have seen all places, there is none other like thee. For thou were established by the creator Lord Himself who blest thee with glory, Oh Ramdaspur (Amritsar) how thickly populated thou art, and the temple wearest unparalleled beauty.[2]

The building of the new townships like Goindwal and Amritsar, projects like the construction of *baoli* and the holy tank, as also the construction of Harmandir in Amritsar could not have been possible but for the economic strength not only of the Sikh Gurus but also of the Sikh community. "The Sikh Gurus took into consideration the socio-temporal aspect of life with as much seriousness as ethical and this provided a solid material base for the community of disciples they sought to build up. The emphasis on the material basis of life generated among the Sikhs an activist and positive attitude towards life unlike any other sect that emerged out of Bhakti movements of medieval times. As socially committed householders, the Sikhs were expected

[1]Harmandir got the name of Swaran Mandir or Golden Temple when its upper part sheathed in richly embossed and highly gilded sheets was covered with gold by Ranjit Singh in AD 1803.

[2]*Adi Granth*, p. 1362.

to earn an honest living and Guru Nanak had repeatedly emphasized the need for pursuing occupation as a source for healthy living. Mohsin Fani writes, "The Sikhs established that an Udasi or ascetic is not to be esteemed higher than any other family. On that account some of their Gurus are inclined to agriculture, trade and other occupations."[1] The ideas of the Gurus about the prevailing economic conditions, business practices, references to various occupations and mercantile transactions and economic disparities can be discerned in the hymns of the *Adi Granth.* The *Adi Granth* provides an abundance of information concerning the religious beliefs of Nanak and his immediate successors but the historian who pursues a wider social economic and political interest, must labour hard in order to extract from it the materials which he requires. Dr Irfan Habib[2] utilized the *Adi Granth* specifically for glimpses of agrarian issues and for McLeod,[3] the use of mercantile imagery in the hymns of Guru Nanak and successor Gurus leaves no doubt that trade had been of considerable importance in the Punjab.

A very popular *Janam Sakhi* anecdote is the story of *Khara Sauda* or 'The Good Bargain', a name which suggests a glimpse of a mercantile transaction. The anecdote relates how Nanak's father Kalu concerned at this son's apparent inactivity urged him to turn his attention to petty trading— "Son Nanak", said Kalu, "take twenty rupees and bring four or five articles; if on this occasion you make a good bargain you will receive many rupees".[4] Guru Nanak having accepted the money is said to have distributed it to fakirs and then to have informed his father that he had thereby made his good bargain. McLeod has rightly informed that as in the *Adi Granth*, the reference is intended to serve a religious purpose but it can also be read simply as a statement how a rural Khatri might be expected to make some money through a small investment and herein lies its distinctive economic interest.[5] In fact, Guru Nanak was no recluse from family and society and he enjoined upon himself and his disciples a strict obligation of earning one's bread. Positively it consisted in the recognition of material needs of man and acceptance of the dignity of manual labour.

"Despite his transcendence and immanence what is important is that to the Sikh, God is a toiler, there can be no greater glorification of

[1]Mohsin Fani, op. cit., p. 272.

[2]Irfan Habib, "Evidence for Sixteenth Century Agrarian Conditions in the Granth Sahib", in the *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. I, no. 3 (Jan-March 1964).

[3]W.H. McLeod, "Trade and investment in 16th and 17th Century PunjabTestimony of Sikh Devotional Literature", in *Essays in Honour of Ganda Singh,* eds., Harbans Singh and N. Gerald Barrier, Punjab University, Patiala, 1976.

[4]*Bala Janam Sakhi,* Sakhi 6.

[5]W.H. McLeod, op. cit., p. 88.

work than if God Himself toils." The wise never forget, God is a peasant. After preparing well one's land, truth and name are sown. One name produces nine treasures with His grace.[1] Guru Ram Das calls creation the field of God and men his peasants.[2] In a hymn of Kabir creation is homologous to weaving, at one level weaver is God, at another, he is Kabir.[3] Namdev[4] pictures God as a carpenter. Ravidas expresses the quest for spirit on the model of shoemaking.[5] The above hymns leave no doubt as to the significance of work, even for those in devotion of God. A demand for goods, dress, milk, cattle, mare and wife is made by Dhanna Jatt.[6] Even mystically absorbed Kabir[7] says, "the hungry man knows no devotion, take back your rosary I hanker after dust at the feet of saints. God how can we pull together? If you do not give, I am constrained to ask four pounds of flour, half a pound of fat (ghee) along with salt, a pound of lentils. To put life into me morning and evening I want a cot with a pillow and mattress, a quilt for a cover, to make me attend to your devotion." Thus we find, "a charter of material demands transmitted into divine revelation" and it was not without reason that the peasants, artisans, petty traders, carpenters, shopkeepers etc. account for the sociological composition of followers of Guru Nanak and successor Gurus during the sixteenth century. Since the Sikh Gurus sanctified economic activity as essential for living, numerous occupational groups flocked into the fold of Sikhism and sought Guru's blessings for material well being. The backbone of the Sikh community were the productive segments of the then Punjab society i.e., the agriculturists and the class of Khatri traders and businessmen. During the period of Guru Arjun, Sikhism became popular in the countryside and a large number of Majha Jats who had sound financial base embraced Sikhism. As the Jats entered the Sikh fold in increasingly large numbers, the community was provided with a very stable and secure agricultural base. The Sikh Gurus also extended their patronage to Khatris who were a mercantile community. Commerce had led them to distant parts of India and even beyond and the "early geographical extension of the Sikh faith beyond the Punjab is essentially a testimony to the Khatri trading enterprises". Their wealth placed enormous resources at the disposal of the Sikh Gurus. It was with the financial backing of the commercial class of the Khatris, able and

[1]*Adi Granth*, Sri Rag, p. 19.
[2]Ibid., Vargauri, p. 304.
[3]Ibid., Rag Asa, p. 484.
[4]Ibid., Namdev Sorathi, p. 657.
[5]Ibid., Ravidas Sorathi, p. 659.
[6]Ibid., Rag Dhanasari, p. 656.
[7]Ibid., Kabir Sorathi, p. 656.

efficient enough to sustain and support, at any rate, the organization of the Sikh community, that Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjun could carry out their plans for the consolidation and expansion of Sikhism. The Gurus also founded new centres of their faith—Kartarpur, Goindwal, Amritsar and others—which not only became centres of Sikh pilgrimage but also of trade and commerce.

The economic base of the Sikh Gurus received a tremendous boost with the growth of the new township of Ramdaspur i.e., Amritsar. The fourth Guru Ram Das took special care to ensure commercial progress of the new township. Fifty-two types of caste groups from Patti, Kasur and nearby areas were called to settle there for ensuring regular supply of essential commodities to the settlers.[1] A market i.e., Guru-ka-Bazar was set up and a number of rich bankers and traders were encouraged to settle down in the new township. A number of Khatris, mostly in trade, sought blessings of the Guru for *kirat* and *barkat* (i.e. blessings in their profession) which were granted.[2] A wide range of activities of wealth were sanctified by Guru Ram Das and as such many wealthy traders were induced to join the Sikh movement. Incidentally, the settlement of the trading classes added to the financial resources of the Gurus as also it give a great fillip to commercial development of Amritsar. Guru Ram Das felt that spiritual life and worldly fortunes were not contradictory, provided there was no foul practice. He taught his followers the dignity of labour and the new township provided work and livelihood to lots of people. All prejudices against trade were sought to be removed and even the spiritually minded began to take active interest in trade and commerce. Possession of wealth was no longer considered to be *maya* but a salutary and helpful thing in the conduct of human affairs. For a religious man it is not unholy to get wealth provided he spends it in God's ways, gives charity and shares comfort of life with others. Guru Ram Das once said to his Sikhs, "When a Sikh has an important business in hand, join him and pray for him. If you see that this cannot be carried on without funds, collect subscription for him from every quarter and at the same time contribute something yourself."[3] It is in this context that the Guru, realising the need for meeting the expenditure of construction projects, appointed special missionaries-cum-functionaries i.e., *masands* to collect voluntary contributions from the faithful.

In founding the town of Amritsar Guru Ram Das had also laid the foundations of future commercial importance of the new city. However, it was only after the construction of Harmandir, the chief centre of

[1]Giani Gian Singh, *Twarikh-i Gur Khalsa*, p. 344.
[2]Kesar Singh Chhibar, op. cit., p. 40.
[3]M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, vol. II, p. 275.

Sikh pilgrimage, that there was a dramatic transformation and consolidation of Amritsar as a great centre of trade and industry. With the influx of visitors and settlers in the vicinity of the temple, many craftsmen from different parts of the country including carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, dyers, utensil makers etc. sought business in Amritsar. With a quick turnover of certain articles sold by small traders and craftsmen, the number of shopkeepers had grown and specialized markets in specific commodities had developed round the site of the present Golden Temple. This is true of the framework even today.[1] It is evident that during Guru Arjun's time the commercial progress of Amritsar had received a significant boost and its importance increased still further when Guru Arjun transferred his headquarters to this place and it became the chief centre of the Sikh activity.

It is an important historical and sociological phenomenon that the emergence of great centres of religious activity is very often accompanied by the growth of trade and commerce at these centres. Parallels may be drawn between Banaras and Amritsar. The former was a classic seat and citadel of Hindu orthodoxy, religion and culture, a renowned centre of pilgrimage which also became a great dwelling place for thousands of craftsmen and traders who catered to financial and market requirements of permanent residents as well as visitors. Amritsar is also a classic illustration of this historical development. However, there is a difference in so far as the commercial life of Banaras was evolved over a long period, the quick and rapid growth of Amritsar as a commercial centre of great merit was facilitated partly due to its location on the northern route. The roots of the present socio-economic prosperity of Amritsar, however, are to a great extent to be attributed to the social revolution wrought by the Sikh Gurus by their gospel of sanctity of manual labour. While the craftsmen and low caste weavers of Banaras were victims of highhandedness of Brahminical orthodoxy, those of Amritsar suffered no such prejudices. The Sikh Gurus repeatedly emphasized the equality and dignity of labour and there was sanctity of a wide range of commercial activities for all irrespective of caste considerations. The community kitchen served alike the king and the cobbler. In fact, contributions of the Sikh Gurus to the building of commercial importance of Amritsar cannot be under-rated. "The socio-economic and theocratic centrality of Amritsar has been vindicated by the course of Sikh history." Amritsar has long been the principal rallying centre of the Sikhs and the history of the city and that of the

[1]This is evident from the names of the bazars such as Misri Bazar, Mochi Bazar, Dal Mandi, Atta Mandi, Chawal Mandi, Namak Mandi etc. Alongside the market places were developed residential areas in small lanes barely five to six feet in width.

Sikh community have has been closely intertwind. Prof. Fauja Singh has rightly said that "Amritsar is now not only the largest city of Punjab but is also a great entreport of trade and commerce, a magnificent seat of learning and literature, the holiest of holy places, the biggest centre of Sikh politics and the strongest defence-post on the country's northwest frontier."[1]

It is by now evident that the Sikh Gurus added to the financial resources of the Sikh *panth* by fostering trade and commerce. This is quite conceivable particularly in view of the fact that the main locale of the activities of Guru Nanak and those of his successors was mainly the land of the five rivers, the Punjab, which lies across both of the principal trading land routes linking India with central Asia and Western Asia. Apart from geographical and historical significance Punjab had been conspicuous for its prominence of trade and commerce. Trade from the North-West had for centuries been funnelled through the Khyber Pass, a route which leads directly into the Punjab. The Sikh Gurus were aware of the economic significance of their seat of power and the fifth Guru Arjun despatched his followers to foreign countries to take active part in foreign trade through over land routes and it is probable that his transactions as a merchant were extensive although confined to purchase of horses in Turkestan.[2] Although evidence on this point is unsatisfactory, trade in horses was not a new thing. Guru Nanak's father Kalu had once asked him to be a dealer in horses and in his characteristic fashion, using mercantile imagery, Nanak replied, let the hearing of sacred scripture be your commerce, load the horses with wares of truth and be on your way. Let good deeds be the payment of your travel expenses and do not suppose that this business can be put off until tomorrow, proceed forthwith to the realm of the formless one, there you shall dwell in peace.[3]

It is evident that even in the days of Guru Nanak trading in horses was not an unknown thing. There is an anecdote in the *Bala Janam Sakhi* which shows that Nanak had read the thoughts of Nawab at Sultanpur and that during the prayer the Nawab had been contemplating a journey to Qandhar to buy horses.[4] The strong possibility is that horse trading in Qandhar was lucrative business and a distinctive trade of the Pathans in India, especially given the fact that no good horses were available in India and had to be imported. This lucrative horse-trade most probably came within the purview of the Khatris also who by now had come to play a predominant role in the commercial life of

[1]Fauja Singh, ed., *The City of Amritsar*, p. 5.
[2]J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 52.
[3]*Adi Granth*, Rag Sorathi, p. 595.
[4]*Bala Janam Sakhi* (Hafiz Qutb-ud-din edition, 1871) Sakhi, 6.

the Punjab and had also moved beyond the borders of the Punjab because of unusual trading enterprise. There is no conclusive evidence to prove Guru Arjun's personal participation in the horse trade but it is quite possible that he encouraged his Khatri Sikhs to engage in this business. Apart from financial benefits, it could be used as a channel for propagation of the Sikh faith; a Sikh merchant going to Kabul or Qandhar might work as a missionary worker. As a result of Guru Arjun's patronage of trade and commerce a stable economic base was secured and flow of economic resources further strengthened cohesion and integration of the Sikh *panth.* The Sikh Gurus knew the importance of capital for trade and commerce and they also were fully aware of the significance of necessities of life like food, clothing and housing. In the *bani* of Guru Ram Das, for instance, the wealth and riches of the Sikhs are sanctified. "Blessed is the God conscious being and the riches he enjoys. Those who expand their riches in God's ways, are blessed in the giving and those who dwell on the Lord's house are never in want."[1] Indeed, those who earn merit by following the path of true Guru, their mansions and houses are sanctified. Thus wealth was not a taboo for the Sikhs, what was taboo is excessive love for and display as also misuse of wealth. The anecdote concerning Seth Duni Chand of Lahore (as recorded in the *Janam Sakhi,* B 40[2] and also related in the *Puratan Janam Sakhi*[3]) is significant to take note of. Duni Chand was a Dhuppar Khatri of Lahore. Baba Nanak happened to arrive in Lahore where Duni Chand took the Guru to his home. Guru Nanak observed seven pennants fluttering above the house and, when asked for an explanation, Duni Chand proudly informed him that each pennant represented a lakh of rupees. Baba Nanak then gave Duni Chand a needle and instructed him to return it when they met in the world hereafter. Duni Chand agreed to do so but was latter mocked by his wife for his foolishness. How could he possibly carry a needle with him to the hereafter. Duni Chand pursued Baba Nanak and returned the needle, explaining that he now realized it could not be carried across the threshold of death. Baba Nanak replied that the same also applied to his hoarded wealth. Guru Nanak was obviously teaching the uselessness of hoarded wealth.

The Sikh Gurus did not favour hoarding of wealth in a blind way because the blind passion for accumulation of wealth, without honestly working for it, led to exploitation of the deprived. The *Adi Granth* condemns living by exploitation, bribery and corruption again and again. Bhai Gurdas is on record to have said that the Gurus pronounced

[1]*Adi Granth*, Var Sarang, p. 1246.
[2]*Janam Sakhi*, B 40, f. 189-90 (India Office Library MS. Panj.).
[3]*Puratan Janam Sakhi*, Sakhi 37.

themselves very strongly against exploitation particularly of the poorer sections of the society. Guru Nanak pointed out that for a Hindu to live by exploitation was like eating beef, for a Muslim it was like taking pork. It is evident from various references in the *Adi Granth* that the Sikh Gurus had before them the vision of a community where wealth should be generated through hard manual labour, a social order where no one should be obliged to beg for one's barest needs, in which there should be no exploitation of man by man and a special consideration for those who constituted the underprivileged sections of the society. It is in this context that the Sikh Gurus identified themselves with the lowly and encouraged and valued the contributions of craftsmen, shoemakers, carpenters and other artisans. They exhorted the bankers and money lenders not to be oppressive, eschew exploitation and be compassionate to the poor. The institution of *langar* proved to be a shelter for the have-nots and abolished social and economic barriers. Thus in the single *varan* to which the Sikhs of Bhai Gurdas's age belonged there were rich magnates as well as paupers and the difference between them appeared to be a part of the Divine order.

It is important that despite the sanctity of and involvement in secular affairs and their encouragement to trade and commerce, the Sikh Gurus continued to uphold the ethical values and were absorbed in spiritual pursuits even in the midst of material prosperity. The Sikh Gurus favoured affluence for their followers. Let the rivers be cows, oceans full of milk and ghee, this earth be sugar, enjoyment ever for mankind.[1] Yet with all the riches and comfort, a *Gurumukh* was not to become a slave of riches, his mind was to be set on spiritual pursuit. Very often the Sikh Gurus made effective use of mercantile imagery to emphasize the religious context of their teaching. This is illustrated by Guru Nanak's *sabad:*

> Let the increase of your years be a shop stocked with the merchandise of divine name. Let the faculty be your warehouse and store therein (your stock of divine Name). Deal with (other) traders (in the divine Name) and harvest a profit of truth within your heart.[2]

Another characteristic hymn begins thus:

> When you trade, O trader, guard your wares. Buy only those articles which you can carry (to hereafter). For there the master merchant is wise and taking your merchandise, He will scrutinize it with care.[3]

[1]*Adi Granth*, pp. 141-42.
[2]Ibid., p. 595.
[3]Ibid., p. 22.

We have examples of this type by the first, fourth and fifth Gurus.[1] Numerous hymns in the *Adi Granth* leave no doubt that the Sikh Gurus insisted on maintaining a balance between materialism and asceticism. This was in harmony with founder Guru Nanak's teaching who had sanctified economic activity as necessary for healthy living and the successor Gurus too were not against the riches enjoyed by their followers. It was the grace of Guru and the God that one enjoyed affluence. "All holy is the wealth, property and riches of the Guru oriented".[2]

The bards whose compositions are incorporated in the *Guru Granth Sahib* seemed quite justified in praising the balance of character, called Raj Yoga, maintained between asceticism and prosperity.[3] Bard Sall Bhatt explains the Raj Yoga of Gurus in the following lines of *Guru Granth Sahib*—"With canopy on your head you are seated on the true throne and blessed with secular and spiritual power. Shall, the bard, utters the truth, Guru Ram Das eternal is your regime and unconquerable your army."[4] Thus, according to Hari Ram Gupta, "The new buildings and prosperity of Amritsar, the fine horses, the court musicians and retainers in attendance of *Sacha Badshah* (the true king) were symbols of grandeur and glory of Raj Yoga of the Sikh Gurus."[5] The Sikh Gurus practised Raj Yoga, so described, in so far as they were householders who enjoyed worldly comforts, yet remained mentally detached from materialism and remained absorbed in His name.

The organizational and institutional efforts of the first four successor Gurus as also the financial stability of Sikhism had brought into its orbit numerous adherents. The rapid numerical expansion of the Sikh faith was further accelerated as a result of the missionary activity of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Amar Das despite his old age took tours to places which were strongholds of Hindu orthodoxy, particularly Kurukshetra, Hardwar etc. It may be argued with a degree of justification that the Guru was not performing a pilgrimage to Hindu places nor did he carry out the suggestion of the Emperor Akbar,[6] but with a motivation

[1]Ibid., pp. 74-78, 372.

[2]Ibid., p. 1246.

[3]The Bhatts have referred to Raja Janak of ancient times who was regarded as a living example of Raj Yoga. Raj Yoga is a synthesis of secular and spiritual sovereignty. Later it became conspicuous in the life of Guru Hargobind who were two swords symbolising *miri* (royalty) and *piri* (spiritualism).

[4]*Adi Granth*, p. 1406.

[5]H.R. Gupta, *History of the Sikh Gurus*, p. 92.

[6]Sarup Das Bhalla writes that after the emperor had discussed the complaints of Brahmins and Khatris of Lahore he made a suggestion to Bhai Jetha for Guru, that is Amar Das, to take pilgrimage to holy places to divert the enmity of Brahmins. *Mehma Prakash*, p. 141.

of his to disseminate and propagate the message of his faith, with a view to bringing the misguided people to the right path. It seems, the underlying purpose was the same as had led Guru Nanak to visit Hindu centres on important occasions and deliver his message to vast crowds assembled at religious festivals.

From the accounts of Bhai Jetha[1] who had accompanied Guru Amar Das in his tours, it appears that the visit to Kurukshetra was the occasion of *Abbichu purb* (the solar eclipse occurring when Nakshatra Abhijit is the ruling conjunction) and there were large crowds keen to listen to the Guru. Among them the most conspicuous were the ascetics from different religious denominations and scholars well-versed in various schools of Hindu philosophy. On realising the great popularity of the Guru, they held important discussions on such issues as Sanskrit language versus popular dialect as the vehicle of spiritual instruction and position of women and Shudras in society. Regarding the first, the Guru was asked why he had abandoned Sanskrit and composed hymns in a 'vulgar' tongue. The reply of the Guru was, "Well water can irrigate only the adjacent land but rain water, the whole world. On this account the Guru had composed his hymns in 'vulgar' dialect and enshrined them in popular Gurumukhi character so that men and women of all creeds can read them."[2]

Likewise, at Hardwar, the city's leading men held important discourses with the Guru on the Varnashrama-dharma and asked the Guru, why he caused the four castes to do homage to him while he himself did no homage to any other, not even the Brahmins. The Guru's reply was that the Brahmins were already very arrogant and if he paid homage to them, their pride would increase still further. And as regards the homage paid to him by the four castes, he remarked that, "neither he nor his predecessors required it from any one. Nanak had appeared to show the right path to people when the burden of evil had engrossed the world, and not to obtain the praise or homage of human beings."[3] In fact, during his missionary tours the Guru exposed the futility of

[1]Bhai Jetha (future Guru Ram Das) who was accompanying the Guru in these visits put forth his experiences of missionary tours in the form of a long *sabad*. This *sabad* in *Adi Granth*, (Rag Tukhari, p. 1116) is the most authentic account of missionary tours undertaken by the third Guru. Besides referring to the main events that took place at three different places—Kurukshetra, Jamuna and Hardwar, it sheds significant light on the nature of the object of journey which has been explained as good of people by telling them more about Nanak's message of unity of God and brotherhood of man and stressing the futility of performance of rituals at pilgrimages, the hollowness of creed and caste prejudices generating religious fanaticism.

[2]M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, vol. II, pp. 109-10.

[3]*Mehma Prakash*, p. 152.

caste and hypocrisy of the Brahmins, and dilated on the universalism of the path of Guru Nanak. Thus as a result of missionary tours, Guru Amar Das carried much farther the work of Guru Nanak and as Latif writes, "Guru Amar Das was successful as a preacher and his zeal and activity in preaching, combined with his genial habits and disposition, secured for him many converts to the new faith."[1]

The work of spreading the Sikh faith went on effectively under the fourth and fifth Gurus. During the pontificate of Guru Ram Das, Bhai Gurdas's efforts as a preacher in Agra secured a large following for the Sikh faith. The fifth Guru Arjun carried the new faith to the very doorsteps of the people through tours in the Majha area.[2] He first visited Khadur and Goindwal—the two places sanctified by his predecessors. Besides passing through several villages, he also founded the new town of Tarn Taran.[3] The foundation of this town was of crucial significance. According to G.C. Narang,

> It was the light that radiated from Amritsar and Tarn Taran that made the peasantry realize their strength and transformed them from peaceful and toiling husbandmen into fiery soldiers and rulers of the soil which their ancestors had ploughed a few generations before them.[4]

Due to organisational and institutional supplements, as also the missionary tours of the third, fourth and fifth Gurus, the numerical strength of the Sikhs increased remarkably. This brought into the Sikh community different caste-loyalties and occupational groups. It was necessary to weaken the emotional links of the various group with their past and to expedite their psychological adjustment with the new social outlook, i.e., to give the process of integration a definite direction. The Gurus discharged this lofty responsibility admirably and by the time of Guru Amar Das, the consciousness of distinction was reinforced by the adoption of distinctively Sikh ceremonies and customs. Annual gatherings at Baisakhi and Diwali also underscored the distinctive position of the Sikhs. Furthermore the construction of tanks, new centres of Sikh pilgrimage and Harmandir weaned them from association

[1]M. Latif, *History of the Punjab*, p. 251.

[2]Majha area or the middle land which extends from Ravi to Beas was a stronghold of agriculturist population of Jats. The centres of Sikh Gurus were close to Majha area and the egalitarian message of the Sikh Gurus particularly attracted large number of Jats who were denied social status in Hindu caste system despite elevation in their economic position.

[3]The name Tarn Taran means a raft to take men across the world's ocean. The popular belief is that the water of the tank here possesses the virtue of curing leprosy, leading to large number of sufferers of this disease inhabiting the area.

[4]G.C. Narang, *The Transformation of Sikhism*, p. 43.

with the centres of Hindu faith. Emergence of Amritsar as chief source of Sikh activity added to the process of social cohesion and integration. By far the most important single factor which provided final consolidation to what had slowly been built since Guru Nanak was a separate scripture to the Sikhs by the fifth Guru Arjun. The formulation of the *Adi Granth* marked the crystallization of a full-fledged identity of a new faith and a new social order.

The pioneering effort in the direction of carving out a separate scripture for the Sikhs was taken by Guru Amar Das. Of late, attempts had begun to be made by not so well-disposed quarters to create confusion in the ranks of the emerging Sikh *panth* by trying to pass spurious writings for those of the Sikh Gurus. This is evident from the following words of Amar Das—"Come ye disciples, beloved of the true Guru, sing a true song, sing a song of the Guru. It will enter the hearts of those on whom God looks with favour. Without the true Guru every song is false, those who utter false songs are false, they who hear it are false and false its authors. No faith can be placed on any song other than that of the Gurus."[1] Thus it is understandable that Guru Amar Das referred to the *bani* of his predecessors as the true *bani* and urged upon his followers to spin false or spurious hymns and to accept and sing only authoritative hymns of the Gurus. Through his words Guru Amar Das cautioned his followers against the fake compositions (*Kachi bani*) circulated in the name of Guru Nanak by rival agencies. However, verbal exhortations alone were not enough. More definite and concrete steps were also needed to achieve the desired end. Realizing the gravity of the situation the Guru thus resolved to preserve authentic composition (*Sachi bani*) of all hymns of the preceding Gurus as well as those of himself by putting them under the seal of his approval. The result was compilation of two volumes, containing the compositions of three Gurus and of some *bhaktas*. The Goindwal volumes can thus be regarded as the first version of the *Adi Granth* and Guru Arjun's collection as an enlarged second version of the *Granth* known as the *Adi Granth*. A commonly accepted view is that codification of the grand volume of the Sikh scripture was undertaken by Guru Arjun in order to preserve its authenticity, lest it was tampered with garbling by schismatic groups.[2] Garbled versions of the scripture, if not checked in time, could lead to rise of inconsistencies in the Sikh religious beliefs and practices. This could also encourage fissiparous tendencies among the Sikhs.

[1]*Adi Granth,* Rag Ramkali, p. 930.

[2]Minas, led by Guru Arjan's rival brother, Pritha, were circulating spurious works bearing the name of Nanak in order to seduce Sikhs from their loyalty to the legitimate succession. To combat this threat Guru Arjun decided to prepare an authorized text bearing his own imprint.

It was with a view to conforming religion to consistency[1] and hindering spurious writings that Guru Arjun sent messages to faithful disciples to transmit to him the hymns of his predecessors. The principal source and substantial nucleus of the scripture was provided by two volumes compiled during Guru Amar Das's pontificate and then in possession of his elder son Mohan. Baba Mohan had not approved of his father's choice of Ram Das as the fourth Guru and Arjun, the son of Ram Das, had some difficulty in persuading him to part with the manuscript. His objections were overcome when Guru Arjun went in person to Goindwal to procure the *pothis* (volumes). There he stood in the street below the upper storey where Mohan resided. The reference to this episode is made in the *Adi Granth*:

> *Mohan tere uche mandara mahal apare,*
> *Mohan tere sohane duara jiu sant dharamsala.*[2]
> (Mohan thy sublime abode is a palace of infinite proportions. Mohan, beautiful is thy door, a resting place for the saints.)

Touched by the compliment Mohan agreed to part with the volumes on loan. They were carried with great reverence to Amritsar on a palanquin and subsequently returned in the same manner.[3]

After Guru Arjun had gained access to the two Goindwal volumes he added to them the numerous compositions of his own and those of Guru Ram Das and a small number of contemporary *bhaktas*. The initiative in collecting the hymns of Farid, Kabir and those of others, the Bhagatbani of the *Adi Granth*, was that of Guru Nanak. It was perhaps part of Guru Nanak's mission to collect the literary pieces, (poetic compositions in particular), eulogizing God and recommending a way of life in conformity with his own vision. Thus Guru Nanak's conception of *gurbani* extended far beyond the words which God as Guru gave him to speak. There is reason to believe that he obtained copies of the verses composed by Jaideva, Beni, Kabir, Shaikh Farid, and other *bhaktas*. In several cases he composed his own hymns that supplemented the work of his predecessors or contemporary saints. Interestingly, both sets of hymns have been preserved in the *Adi Granth*,

[1]According to Macauliffe, Guru Arjun felt the necessity of laying down rules for the guidance of his follower in performance of their daily religious duties and rites. This course could reduce his religion to consistency and hinder divergent tenets and rituals. The consummation, however, could be attained when the exact words of the Gurus were permanently recorded in one grand volume; M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, vol. II, p. 55.

[2]*Adi Granth*, Rag Gauri, p. 248.

[3]There is a palanquin in Gurdwara Haveli Saheb Goindwal which is said to have been used on this occasion.

offering a comparative insight. It seems that Nanak's divine vision had pierced through the apparent differences of different religious paths and had brought out the inherent deep rooted uniformity and harmony of the exalted spiritual truth and the same are embellished in the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

The Sikh scripture was compiled in 1604 but the origin of spiritual ideology of the Sikh faith had its roots in the twelfth century because Muslim divine Baba Farid[1] and Bhakta Jaideva, the well known Sanskrit author of *Gita Govinda*, are the earliest of poet devotees whose compositions are enshrined in the *Adi Granth*. The other poet *bhaktas* of *Adi Granth* include Trilochan and Namdev of Maharashtra, Sadhna of Sindh, Beni of Bihar, Ramananda, Kabir and Ravidas of Uttar Pradesh, Pipa and Seha of Princely states, Dhanna of Rajputana, Bhikhan, Ramanand and Surdas of other northern regions. Profession and caste wise, these *bhaktas* belonged to Sufi and Brahminical orders, calico-printers, meat sellers, barbers, weavers, cobblers and farmers. Except Surdas these poets were either predecessors or near contemporaries of Guru Nanak. At any rate, all of them preceded Guru Arjun, the compiler of the *Adi Granth*. The other set of bards and poets, besides *bhaktas* and Gurus, cover Mardana and Sunder, Balwand and Satta, and eleven Bhattas headed by Kalshar, all belonging to the fifteenth and sixteenth century and known to have been associated with one or more of the first five Gurus. The ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur, whose compositions were included in the second recension of the holy *Granth*, flourished during the seventeenth century.

The principle of selection adopted by Guru Arjun was to include in the *Adi Granth* only such hymns of the saints which conformed to the spirit of reform, echoed sentiments which he wanted to inculcate in his own community and which were apparently in harmony with the teachings of the Gurus. It would not perhaps be wrong to state that by incorporating the works of saints belonging to different areas and faiths i.e., Muslim or Hindus, the Sikh Gurus were making an attempt to assimilate them to Sikhism and to draw the following of different sects founded by like minded medieval religious teachers. The position taken by them in this regard affirms the remarkable catholicity of the Sikh Gurus and "suggests a pan-Indian stance on the part of Guru Arjun who in any case was conscious of the increasing number of

[1]Shaikh Farid is also the first recorded poet of the Punjabi language. Guru Nanak and subsequently Guru Amar Das and Guru Arjun placed some of their own hymns besides those of Shaikh Farid, elaborating the themes he had depicted, thus placing their seal of approval on them. Farid's hymn in Rag Suhi and one of Guru Nanak in the same musical metre, share common terminology and motifs, the Guru's hymn supplementing the message put across by Farid three centuries earlier.

Sikhs in many cities of the Mughal empire outside Punjab."[1] A community of thought may be discerned between the Guru poets of *Guru Granth* on the one hand and the thirty contributors drawn from the ranks of saints, *bhaktas* and bards on the other. The inclusion in the *Adi Granth* makes all the works sacred. Besides, in showing respect to the *Granth Sahib* the Sikhs were made to show respect not only to their Gurus but also to hold in regard other Nirguna saints like Kabir and Sufi saint Baba Farid. This also amounted to showing regard in Sikhism for substantive part of similar religious traditions existing before Guru Nanak.

Although the *Adi Granth* is rightly renowned for the number and the variety of its contributors the great bulk of its contents is in fact formed by the compositions of Guru Nanak and those of his successors—Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjun. The huge material thus being collected, it was decided to begin with compilation and Guru Arjun dictated the *Granth* to his amanuensis, Bhai Gurdas. The making of the *Granth* involved a sustained and vigorous discipline. There had to be a carefully and closely based re-integration and classic harmonization of pre-existent themes in the vast store of religious poetry whether by the *bhaktas* or by the earlier Gurus. The selected materials had to be assigned to appropriate musical measures and transcribed in orderly manner. Guru Arjun carried out the work with extraordinary exactness and methodological design creating a scripture with an exalted mystical tone and high degree of organization. The fifth Guru was a saint and scholar of marvellous literary acumen, a 'poet of prodigious stylistic versatility'. Guru Arjun was also by far the largest single contributor to *Guru Granth Sahib* which he compiled. His well known composition 'Sukhmani', stands out as a poetic marvel and regarded as one of the masterpieces; like Guru Nanak's 'Japji' and Guru Amar Das's 'Anand', Sukhmani (psalm of peace) occupies a place of honour in the Sikh way of life. Guru Arjun's compositions reveal a degree of spiritual craving and devotional urge which is surprising in a man who devoted most of his time and energies to the consolidation of the Sikh community. The compilation and editing of the *Granth Sahib* furnished the crowning stage of his organizational work. At the end of anthology of the sacred writings, Guru Arjun had put the following verse of his own. "Thus—Truth, Harmony and Wisdom—These are seasoned with the name of Lord which is the ground of all; whosoever eats and enjoys it will be saved."[2]

[1]J.S. Grewal, "Legacies of the Sikh Past for the Twentieth Century" (Joseph T. O'Connoll, Milton Israel, Willard G. Oxtoby, eds., with W.H. McLeod and J.S. Grewal, *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century,* p. 20.

[2]*Adi Granth*, p. 1429.

The language of the *Adi Granth* is a formidable mixture of many dialects. Although the distinctive Gurumukhi script had been used to record the vast bulk of sacred writings, the tradition of Sikh poetry was multi-lingual, and evolved through blending together of classical and folk-thematic and formal patterns through all sorts of innovation and experimentation in diction, prosody and symbolism. "The idiom which Guru Nanak as a poet of utterly superb originality and power evolved for the matchless expression of his universal message certainly owed much to his native Sheikhpuri speech. But the very requirements of the universality of his teachings, not to speak of the then pre-existing norms of literary expressions and his own wide travels, involved his drawing upon a far wider range of available linguistic sources."[1]

A comprehensive listing of the vocabulary of Guru Nanak's poetic idiom was undertaken[2] where it was shown that the greatest part of his lexicon is made up of a mixture of contemporary words drawn principally from Punjabi and Khariboli but extending also to the adjacent areas of Siraiki (Multan) and Braj—quite a large number of Perso-Arabic loans are also to be found and considerable use is made of Sanskrit words, particularly in the field of technical religious vocabulary. The composite idiom which Nanak evolved was followed by the successor Gurus. However, within the general heterogeneous nature of the contents of the *Adi Granth* language, the different Gurus made different linguistic emphases. The multi-linguistic activity of the *Adi Granth* does not effect the overall homogeneity of the sacred language of the Sikhs. There are certainly words from diverse languages but, with rare exceptions, they provide no major vocabulary problems. A knowledge of Hindi and Punjabi is an essential pre-requisite and then one can move with relative ease to a study of Sadhukari or Santbhasa, a medium employed all over northern India by religious saints of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. "The preference for the spoken as against the classical languages as the vehicle for divine message proved to be a catalyst of a great cultural consequence. It provided the common people with their tongue so to say, in which they could formulate their true feelings and articulate their aspirations apart from bestowing a new dignity upon these languages as the media for cultural exchange."

The chief problem concerning the *Adi Granth* arises from the fact that there is not one but three different versions. The first is the *Adi*

[1]Christopher Shackle, "Some Observations on the Evolution of Modern Standard Punjabi" in *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, ed., Joseph T. O'Connell et al., p. 105.

[2]See. C. Shackle, A *Guru Nanak Glossary*, London, 1981. The morphology is described in the companion teaching grammar, *An Introduction to the Sacred Language of the Sikhs*.

Bir or original manuscript writing by Bhai Gurdas at the dictate of Guru Arjun. The second version is variously referred as the Banno version or the *Khari Bir*. *Khari* literally means brackish or bitter, in this context spurious or apocryphal. The tradition is that Guru Arjun knew Bhai Banno as a devout Sikh and entrusted him with the responsibility of taking the original to Lahore for binding and he made his copy while on this mission. Banno version includes all that is in the original Kartarpur Bir, with some addition or rather reproduction of what was inscribed in the original, then deleted.[1] The third is the Damdam version, so called because Guru Gobind Singh is said to have dictated it while staying at the village of Damdam Sahib. Having been refused the original copy by Dhirmal, Guru Gobind Singh is said to have dictated a copy of *Granth Sahib* from memory, adding to the original text fifty-nine hymns and fifty-six couplets of his father Tegh Bahadur and also a couplet of his own.[2]

The original *Adi Granth*, first known as *Adi Bir*, was ceremonially installed in the Harmandir on Bhadon Sudi Ikam Samvat 1661 BK (August 16, 1604). Bhai Budha, the first *granthi*, opened it with reverence to obtain from it the divine command as Guru Arjun stood in attendance behind. The following hymn was read as God's own announcement for the occasion.

"He himself hath succoured His saints in their work.
He himself has come to see their work fulfilled.
Blessed is the temple with amrit filled.
Eternal is the perfect Being.
His praises, Vedas and Puranas sing.
The creator hath bestowed on us the nine
treasures and all the charismas.
No lack do I suffer now.
Enjoying his grace, bliss I have attained
Ever expanding is the Lord's bounty."[3]

The completion of the *Granth Sahib* was celebrated with much jubilation and the Sikhs came in large numbers to pay their reverence. Thus the fifth Guru, Guru Arjun, who had chalked out a wide plan for the consolidation of the Sikh faith bequeathed to history and to the

[1]See Shamsher Singh, "Bhai Bannoji di khare-vali bir" in *Khoj Patrika*, Patiala, May 1970, pp. 36-37.

[2]It is this enlarged so called Damdam version which is now invariably used in its printed pagination 1430 today.

[3]*Adi Granth*, p. 1362.

Sikh *panth* a wonderful heritage—*Guru Granth Sahib*[1]—an anthology of the sacred compositions of the Gurus and some of the medieval Indian saints. The *Granth Sahib* fulfilled the requirement of giving a uniform common scripture and an essential ingredient for an independent identity of a given religion. The sacred scripture was to be henceforth the perennial source of inspiration, integration and a very effective means for self-perpetuation and cohesion of the community.

The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh abolished altogether the institution of corporeal Guru and installed the *Granth Sahib* as Guru. It did away with the charismatic leadership of individual Gurus and placed it on a symbol—the *Granth*. Since the day Guru Gobind Singh vested succession in it, the *Guru Granth Sahib* has commanded the same honour and reverence as would be due to the Guru himself. As the *sabad bani* was contained in the *Granth* compiled by Guru Arjun, Guru-ship was deemed to be vested in the *Granth*. The words most familiar to every Sikh express with clarity the doctrine of spiritual Guru embodied in the *Granth*. Singly or in congregational worship, Sikhs conclude their morning and evening prayer with a supplication called *Ardas* which is followed by the recitation of these verses—

Agya bhai akal ki tabhi chalayo panth
Sabh Sikhan kau hukam hai guru maano granth,
Guru Granth ji manio pragat guru ki deh
Jake hirda sudh hai khoj sabad main len

By the command of the timeless creator
was the panth promulgated
All Sikhs are hereby charged to own
the *granth* as their *guru*
Know the *Guru Granth* to be the
person visible of the Guru.
They who would seek to meet the Lord
In the word as manifest in the book
Shall they discover him.

Thus was built the doctrine of *Guru Granth* which is the focal point of the Sikhs' devotion. While spiritual sovereignty was vested in the *Granth*, organizational and administrative aspects of the institution of

[1]Known variously as *Granth Sahib*, *Sri Granth Sahib*, *Sri Adi Granth* or *Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the *Guru Granth Sahib* is the religious scripture of the Sikhs as well as the Guru eternal for them. The basic word in the expressions listed is *granth* meaning, a book, *Sahib* and *Sri* being honorifics, *Guru* indicating its status as successor in Guru-ship after Guru Gobind Singh and *adi* literally original first, distinguishing it from the other sacred book ot the Sikhs the *Dasam Granth* which contains the poetic compositions of the tenth (*Dasam)* Guru.

Guru were vested on a body corporate, which Guru Gobind Singh called the Khalsa, the entire body of the Sikhs as his successor and its mission was to carry out the spiritual and secular message that resided in the Book. The formation of Khalsa and the doctrine of Guru *panth* was based on an uncompromising equality of every member with others and it implied democratic functioning, "Here was thus a step taken which was unique in the history of medieval feudal India—in the context of the time and space it was a most democratic step, socially and politically effective—at the same time it showed to the medieval feudal world of India that power and strength, whether spiritual or temporal, originated from and resided in the people."[1] Thus the abolition of the institution of Guru was replaced by the concepts of Guru *panth* and *Guru Granth*. The former emphasized that collective sovereignty rested with the Khalsa i.e., corporate body of the entire community, the latter upheld the spiritual supremacy and centrality of the *Granth Sahib*. During the eighteenth century both the concepts shared divine authority and worked in harmony, supplementing each other. But the theory of dual authority continued only for a brief period and the *egalitarian* character of the order of Khalsa could not be maintained after the establishment of Sikh rule. And as Sir John Malcolm wrote[2]—the doctrine of Guru *panth*, though retained in theory, was significantly amended in actual practice and superceded by the establishment of Sikh monarchy under Ranjit Singh. However, the principle of unity and equality was kept intact by the doctrine of *Guru Granth* and in the presence of *Guru Granth Sahib* all Sikhs were equal irrespective of social or political power. Contemporary records testify that even Ranjit Singh began his day by making obeisance to the *Granth Sahib*. Within the *panth* the words of *Granth Sahib* cannot be transgressed and the centrality of the *Granth Sahib* in the Sikh way of worship is both crucial and enormous. It is the living source of Guru's authority, the focal point of Sikh devotion and the ultimate guide for the spiritual and secular path pointed by the Gurus.

A very distinguishing feature of the Sikh scripture is that though the nucleus impulse of the Sikh poetry is religious it *subsums* both secular and religious themes as a matter of experience, vision and values. If we analyse the hymns and the rich imagery of nature, hearth and home, business, commerce, various professions, the cycle of seasons, the cattle, articles of food, dress, simple domesticities of life, beliefs and values, principles of economic activity as also norms of political behaviour etc.—various references leave no doubt about the fact that

[1]Niharranjan Ray, *The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society*, p. 70.

[2]John Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, pp. 12-23, also W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of Sikh Community*, pp. 48-49.

Guru Granth, linked to secular themes, sanctifies phenomenological aspects of reality, the material aspirations and necessities of life. In the poetry of Guru Nanak particularly in the Japji and Bara-Maha, there is a clear affirmation of faith in the reality of life. The bridal and spousal imagery in particular authenticates Nanak's reverence for the secular aspects of life even when the metaphors are mystical in meaning and suggestion. The socio-temporal consciousness is transparent in the writings of successor Gurus also and "as one reads through the *Adi Granth* one can indeed construct with the help of images, symbols, similes and metaphors, words and phrases, the visual image of the manscape and landscape of the Punjab of the first five Gurus". It may be added that even socio-political aspects are not outside the scope of the *Granth*. The *banis* of the Gurus transcend caste divisions of Indian society in search of a universal man. "Worthless is caste and worthless exacted name. For all mankind there is but single refuge." Political injustice and aggression are denounced in equally bold terms, "Greed is the king and sin his minister." Again, "he who trieth to rule over another is a fool, an indiscriminate wretch", so reads a *bani* of Guru Nanak uttered in the context of the tyrannies of Babur, the first Mughal Emperor. There are references to the emperors, kings, the rajas, the nobles, the lapses in their behavioural pattern, high-handedness and consequent sufferings of the masses. The *Adi Granth* also repeatedly upholds the concept of divine wrath overtaking the evil doers and wicked. God protects his own devotees and degrades their detractors and enemies.

The subject of the *Granth Sahib* is thus of a man in his totality. It comprehends every aspect of man, his beliefs, his values, methods of worship, rules of conduct in society, polity, even regulations about economic activity. The various themes which are as complex as life itself have not been treated separately. All of them have been often combined together in a flowing discourse like various colours in a spectrum. The world of the spirit is integral 'with the spirit of the world' and again 'the affair with God' and 'affair with the world' of actualities intersect each other at various levels. In fact, *Adi Sri Granth Sahib* is a message and programme of reconstruction of the entire life, body and soul given to people who were to seek guidance from it on the doctrine, on the tenets of the faith and to adopt it in their own lives and then to carry it to others through a leader i.e., Guru who gave timely instructions to guide his people and lead the movement to success. It is apt to quote Darshan Singh Maini—"with the finalization of the *Guru Granth* and its consecration as Guru, a living master, the

convergence of the two strains, religious and secular in Punjabi poetry, becomes an article of faith."[1]

We have by now analysed on a broad historical perspective the social dimensions of Nanak's faith under the first four successor Gurus. The Sikh community under various *Gurus* had undergone a process of explicit institutional and organizational discipline and strength. By the time of fifth Guru Arjun, there is a crystallization of an organic system of functional relationship in which the unique nature and institution of Guru-ship, the *panth* and the *Granth*, the sanctification of mundane affairs and commercial activity, the development of Amritsar as a nucleus of Sikh religious and temporal affairs, are decisive landmarks. Moreover, Harmandir and the scriptural sanctity of the *Adi Granth* helped provide all the factors that would generate a unique sense of self-confidence and self-determination among the Sikhs as also provide an intensified *panthic* identity to the Sikh community. In the new self-awareness of the distinction and consolidation of the Sikh *panth* there was a definite departure from the orthodox Hindu fold and the Sikhs were wedded together into a new brotherhood united by common ties of privilege and duties; loyalty to the Guru being an article of absolute faith and devotion. In the process of forging a distinctive cultural ethos of their own, they alienated both the Brahminical hierarchy and the Muslim empire. What Guru Nanak and the successor Gurus had taught was something radically different, something which breathed a spirit of liberalism and egalitarianism as against the existing conservatism and caste code of the Brahminical order. As the Sikh *panth* expanded in numerical strength with a definite ideology and distinct social institutions of its own, the orthodoxy reacted negatively to socially radical teachings of the Sikh Gurus because it was not merely a question of some of their long cherished beliefs and social taboos of the caste being challenged but their very dominant position was also at stake. No wonder the enemies and opponents of the Sikh *panth* did not miss any opportunity or device to malign the Gurus and the Sikhs. They found the best opportunity when the Mughal Emperor Akbar visited the Punjab in AD1566. While the emperor encamped at Lahore, the ill-disposed Brahmins and the Khatris lodged a serious complaint against Guru Amar Das. The substance of the complaint was important since it indicated the distinct socio-religious profile of the Sikhs. The substance of the complaint given by Macauliffe is as follows:

[1]Darshan Singh Maini, "Religious and Secular Strains in Twentieth Century Punjabi Poetry" in *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century,* ed. Joseph T. O'Connell et al.

> The Majesty is the protector of our customs and the redresser of the wrongs. Everyman's religion is dear to him. Guru Amar Das of Goindwal hath abandoned the religious and social customs of the Hindus and abolished the distinction of four castes. Such heterodoxy hath never been heard of before in the four ages. There is now no twilight prayer, no *gayatri*, no offering of water to ancestors, no pilgrimages, no worship of idols. The Guru hath abandoned all these and established the repetition of 'Waheguru' instead of Ram and no one now acteth according to Vedas or Smiritis. The Guru seateth all his followers in a line and cause them to eat together from his kitchen irrespective of caste whether they are Jats, strolling minstrels, Mohammadans, Brahmins, Khatris, shopkeepers, sweepers, barbers, washermen, fishermen or carpenters. We pray thee to restrain him now, else it will be difficult hereafter. And may thy religion and empire increase and extend over the world.[1]

After hearing the said complaint, the emperor despatched a messenger to request the Guru's attendance at the court. The Guru was too old to undertake the journey and nominated Bhai Jetha (future Guru Ram Das) to represent him in the Mughal court. Bhai Jetha was enjoined by the Guru to answer all the allegations and queries boldly and fearlessly and to vindicate before the emperor, the true teachings of Guru Nanak.[2] When Bhai Jetha appeared at the court, he was interrogated on all the points which had been raised in the petition made by the Brahmins and Khatris, the emperor was fully convinced of the hollowness of the complaint against the Sikh Guru. The liberal minded emperor greatly appreciated the Sikhs' position on the issue of caste, pilgrimages, rituals, idols and dismissed the complaint with the following words, "I see no hostility to Hinduism in this man (Guru Amar Das), nor do I find any fault with his compositions. To read or not to repeat the *gayatri* is at his own discretion. Jetha's words show how the mind may be purified and hypocrisy renounced. There is no difference between God and his *darvesh*. No man can vie with either. Your complainants are enemies of truth and are only causing needless annoyance."[3]

The impression of Bhai Jetha made on the emperor aroused a keen desire in the latter to meet Guru Amar Das. A few years later, the emperor personally waited upon the Guru at Goindwal and even had his meal in the Guru's *langar*. The tradition has it that the emperor also made a land grant in the name of Guru's daughter Bibi Bhani. All this gave a great boost to the Sikh *panth* and, for the rest of the reign of Akbar, Guru's adversaries were silenced. Some trouble was, however,

[1]Macauliffe, op. cit., p. 108.
[2]*Mehma Prakash*, p. 138.
[3]Macauliffe, op. cit., p. 108.

created by a few Muslim Shaikh families settled at Goindwal. At their instance, a group of young boys tried to harass the Sikhs who used to fetch water from the river Beas for the Guru's kitchen. Although the clashes of this nature went on for quite some time, the Guru was not in favour of any confrontation with the miscreants. Whenever his aggrieved followers approached him, in this connection, for help he always counselled them to have patience and not to take revenge. His arguments were based on his faith in the theory of divine chastisement which meant that God being the saviour of his devotees would never fail to help them when they were in trouble.[1] Guru Amar Das states, "thou ever protectest the saints, thou has been protecting the saints from very first, thou saved Prahlad (a saint) and destroyed Harnakusha (tyrant). The saints are convinced about this, only the self-willed are entangled in illusion."[2]

The discomfort and uneasiness in the ranks of detractors increased once again when Guru Arjun was providing a finishing consolidation to the Sikh *panth* by compiling the Sikh scripture. While the *Granth* was still under preparation, the enemies of the Guru reported to the emperor Akbar that the Guru was compiling a book in which the Muslim and Hindu prophets were reviled. The emperor made a personal investigation in the matter and desired to see the sacred volume himself. At that juncture, the following hymn from the *Adi Granth* was read out to him at random:

> I do not keep the Hindu fast or the month of Ramazan. I serve him alone who is my refuge. The one Lord of the world is my God. He ministers justice to both Hindus and Muslims. I do not go to the *Haj* nor worship at Hindu pilgrimage places. I serve only the one Lord and no other, I offer neither Hindu worship (*puja*) nor Muslim prayer (*namaz*). Holding the one formless Lord in my mind I worship him there. I am neither a Hindu nor a Muslim.[3]

The Emperor Akbar appreciated the eclectic temper of the Sikh scripture.[4] He must have realized that the passage read out to him did not amount to denunciation of Hinduism and Islam but was only an assertion that Sikhism itself was a distinct faith. Also since Sikhs were neither Hindus nor Muslims, Sikhism could provide large areas of

[1]*Adi Granth*, p. 637.
[2]Ibid., pp. 170, 768.
[3]Ibid., p. 1136.
[4]Emperor Akbar also remitted at this event a portion of the annual revenue of peasants of Punjab whose hardship was brought to his notice by Guru Arjun. *Khulast-ut-Tawarikh*, p. 425.

thought in which the devout leaders of the two faiths could meet indeed. The aim of the Gurus had been to provide the *panth* with a distinctive *dharma,* a higher level of religious experience which would be acceptable to all but the fanatical orthodox of both faiths, who sought to separate communities into Hindu and Muslim people.

Though Mughal emperor Akbar's eclectic approach and friendly outlook helped in the stabilization of the *panth*, the Sikh Gurus tried to encounter the malicious activities of the detractors by repeatedly emphasising the unique position and superiority of the Guru and the Sikh faith. Mark Juergensmeyer avers, "This is the view, in many cases historically justified, that the Sikhs as a people and their culture are under attack and in danger of being destroyed, or just as threatening, in danger of being assimilated away into a dominant tradition by a process of cultural osmosis" and that "the protective attitude has been a persistent feature of Sikh history."[1] We may take this protective attitude as a legacy of the Sikh Gurus and it is important to note that it was in the context of gravity of situation and danger of opponents and enemies of Sikhism, that the writings of fifth Guru Arjun and Bhai Gurdas were intended to strengthen the inner confidence of their followers by emphasizing upon the unique position of the Guru and superiority of the Sikh *panth*. Bhai Gurdas enunciated ideas and concepts most consequential for the cohesion and solidarity of the *panth*. Absolute loyalty to the divine Guru, the human saviour was made the pre-condition of salvation. The difference between a *Gurumukh* and *Manumukh* was repeatedly stressed. The *Gurumukh* or follower of the Guru and Sikh way of life is likened to a bright silken cloth which can be dyed in any colour and fit to be used on occasions and *Manumukh* (the one who has turned away from the Guru) to a coarse blanket which refuses all hue.[2] Bhai Gurdas loudly proclaimed the excellence and uniqueness of the system promulgated by the Sikh Gurus[3] and a divine sanction is openly claimed for Sikhism: Writings of Bhai Gurdas (who stands as an eminent spokesman of Sikhism) encouraged the members of the *panth* to believe that they were the chosen few, God's elect in the Kaliyug and as such distinct and different from others.[4] Seen in the light of social dimensions and consolidation of Sikhism under the first four successors of Nanak, the statements of Bhai Gurdas can be regarded as part of the process to ensure cohesion and separate self-identity of the new community by safeguarding against re-absorption

[1]Mark Juergensmeyer, "Sikhism among the World Religions" in *Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religion*, April-Oct, 1988, p. 2.

[2]Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 5, Pauri 519.

[3]Bhai Gurdas, *Vars* 1, 16, 23, 45.

[4]Bhai Gurdas, *Vars* 1, 6, Pauri 23.

of Sikhism in the orthodox fold of Hinduism and to preserve the reformatory spirit of Guru Nanak's teachings.

During the first century of its evolution, the Sikh faith and the society gradually detached itself from Hinduism. Although the followers of the new faith retained their links with Hindu society in many ways, they also showed a tendency to maintain their distinct and separate self-identity as a community. Lest the Brahaminical influences of Hindu orthodoxy should re-assert themselves over their followers, the third, fourth and fifth Gurus endeavoured hard to make the Sikh position in matters of socio-religious beliefs and behaviour as definite as possible. The introduction of some special ceremonies were a corollary of the separate modes of worship adopted by Guru Nanak and reflected a clearer consciousness of a distinctive character. As it evolved its separate social identity, different from Hinduism and Islam, Sikhism found itself in confrontation with reaction from both Hindu and Muslim orthodoxy on the one hand and politico-cum-religious persecution of the Muslim state on the other. While the rival claimants to the position of Gurus encouraged desertions from the Sikh Guru's establishment, Muslim orthodoxy launched its own campaign of slander and opposition to the Sikh *panth* and was considerably instrumental in building the Mughal imperial bias against the Gurus and their followers.[1] Jahangir succeeded in having Guru Arjun executed in AD 1606 for his alleged blessings to the rebel prince Khusrao. This event marked the fulfilment of Guru Nanak's spirituo-ethical vision and injunctions. Guru Nanak, symbolizing the way of sacrifice which is inevitable for one entering the spiritual moral quest says, "shouldst thou cherish the desire to participate in the play of true love, place thy head on the palm of thy head; then alone must thou enter this quarter; shouldst thou put thy foot forward on this path, hesitate not to give thy head."[2] Willingness to suffer trial for one's convictions was a religious imperative; personal piety must have a core of moral strength and Guru Arjun's life exemplified this. The spiritual heritage of the Sikhs, as descended through the message of Guru Nanak, had always been characterized by a world view which could turn the followers of Sikhism into crusaders and martyrs for causes where issues of conscience were involved. The ideology of Guru Nanak left room for responding to oppression as a heroic struggle. In the process of reaction to martyrdom of Guru Arjun and awareness of external threat, the Sikh *panth* became increasingly conscious of preserving its *panthic* identity and evolved its own military-

[1]The negative and reactionary role of the dissenters as also the Muslim orthodoxies is analysed in the forthcoming chapter on political ramifications of Sikhism.

[2]*Adi Granth*, p. 1412.

cum-defensive norms. It is not surprising that intensive social cohesion and solidarity, the organizational infra-structure, economic self-sufficiency, coupled with consciousness of comradeship, born out of common faith and collective commitment to the trust of the Gurus, contributed to the evolution of the Sikh movement into one capable of resisting the religious persecution to which it was subjected from the period of the fifth guru, Guru Arjun onwards.

6

Political Ramifications of the Sikh Movement Under the First Five Sikh Gurus

Diverse views have been expressed by various scholars and historians in regard to the 'political ramifications' of Guru Nanak's faith and its development under the successive Gurus. The various views can be broadly categorized into (i) those holding it to be an exclusively religious movement and refusing to countenance even the slightest suggestion about its having even a minimal of political content. Consequently they also regard the later developments under Guru Hargobind and more particularly under Guru Gobind Singh as deviations from the teachings of the first five Gurus; (ii) those who unreservedly state that the movement was essentially a political one, not only based on the edifice built by Guru Nanak but also being in fulfilment of his 'own mission'; and (iii) those who hold that though it was primarily of a religious nature, yet it had some political potential from its inception which paved the way for and even prepared the Sikhs, both ideologically and organizationally, for taking up the cudgels against possible onslaughts on their faith. This view holds the later developments in the Sikh movement under Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh as a natural historical out-growth from the old, with Guru Nanak having laid down a few basic concepts, which had since been undergoing a process of evolution. There are still others whose views fall somewhere in-between those expressed by the proponents of the three categories mentioned above.

Prominent among those who belong to the first category are Western scholars like John B. Noss, Prof. Arnold Toynbee, J.D. Cunningham and Fredrick Pincott. These Western scholars have tried to establish that Sikhism, as originally expounded by Guru Nanak, was different from Sikhism as subsequently developed by his later successors. John B. Noss took special note of the conversion of Sikhism from a quietistic creed into a vigorously activistic political faith. The original Sikhism was, according to him, essentially a code of philanthropy, honesty and

holiness but the subsequent development was distressingly strange because the Sikhs introduced military ardour in full strength by self dedication to the arbitrament of the sword.[1] Arnold Toynbee regarded the 'transformation' of the movement as sinister[2] and, according to him, the Sikhs renounced their spiritual birth-right when they allowed themselves to be goaded into militancy by the tyrannical and oppressive policy of the Mughul empire. He viewed Guru Gobind Singh's resort to arms as a drift towards 'totalitarian militarism'. According to him, Sikhism, instead of establishing itself on the ruins of the decaying Hindu civilization, invested its spiritual treasure in the perverse political enterprise of founding a mundane empire.[3] For Toynbee, the political concerns of Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh as well as the later political activity of the Sikhs appeared to be a deviation from the teachings of Guru Nanak. J.D. Cunningham held that Guru Nanak probably did not possess any clear idea of 'political advancement' and his reform 'in its immediate effects' was only religious and moral.[4] Frederic Pincott has asserted that the political activity of the Sikhs was a reversal of the 'the best intentions' of the founder of Sikhism.[5]

Among those belonging to the second category, the western scholar Trumpp has projected the view that the Sikhs by the time of Guru Arjun Dev were, "gradually accustomed to a kind of government of their own and had begun to feel themselves as a firmly organised and strong party within the state."[6] Jagjit Singh has characterised the Sikh movement as an outrightly 'plebeian political revolution,'[7] which was even far more radical than the French Revolution of 1789. He has further made out that the Sikh movement had before it three main goals viz. the creation of an egalitarian society (the Sikh *panth*), fighting religious and political domination and capturing of political power for a plebeian mission. All these three goals, in his perception, were closely linked and inter-dependent. He contends that the political orientation and development of the Sikh movement was only a projection of the Sikh view of religion and the Sikh *panth* established outside the caste society. It was meant to be and was successfully used as a base to challenge the political power of the times, apart from the religious one.[8] Some of the protagonists of this view, have, in support of their argument, even been enthusiastic enough to pose an entirely hypothetical

[1]John B. Noss, *Man's Religion*, p. 282.
[2]Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. V, p. 537.
[3]Ibid., vol. V, pp. 665-66; vol. VII, pp. 466-67.
[4]J.D. Cunningham, *A History of Sikhs*, pp. 41-42.
[5]Pincott et al., *The Sikh Religion—A Symposium*, p. 70.
[6]E. Trumpp, *The Adi Granth*, p. xxxi.
[7]Jagjit Singh, *The Sikh Revolution*, pp. 38, 102.
[8]Ibid., pp. 37, 102.

query as to "who knows that given the means which Guru Gobind Singh had at his disposal with the work of ten generations which had prepared the ground for him, Nanak would have met the situation in the same way in which the former did in his own time afterwards."[1]

Close to, though not exactly falling in the above category, is Sir G.C. Narang who has been prominently as well as profusely quoted by successive students of Sikh history for his well known assertions that the 'sword which carved the Khalsa's way to glory was undoubtedly forged by Gobind, but the steel had been provided by Nanak; that the seed which blossomed in the time of Guru Gobind Singh had been sown by Nanak and watered by his successors; and that, by the time of Guru Arjun Dev, a state, peaceful and unobtrusive, had been slowly evolved and with the Guru at its head as '*Sacha Padshah*', the Sikhs had already become accustomed to a form of self-government within the empire and. . . they were fast becoming a factor in the political life of the province'.[2]

It is, however, the third category[3] of scholars viz. the advocates of the 'theory of continuity' of approach from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind who far outnumber those who have projected the theories of 'exclusively religious' or 'exclusively political' nature. Macauliffe has averred that "Guru Gobind Singh never deviated from the path originally marked out by his predecessors. On the other hand, he pursued the same with intense realism and foresight and steadfast devotion in order to achieve the elevation of the saints and virtuous as also the elimination of the tyrants."[4] Fauja Singh has stressed that while trying to understand the political ideas of the later generation (of Sikhs) it is imperative that we should never lose sight of their heritage coming down from the preceding period of the Gurus.[5] Puran Singh has described Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master, as "Guru

[1]Sher Singh, *Philosophy of Sikhism*, p. 24.

[2]G.C. Narang, *The Transformation of Sikhism*, pp. 17, 36. These assertions by Narang have, by themselves, earned him the odium of "interpreting everything in terms of politics". (See Teja Singh & Ganda Singh, *A Short History of Sikhs*, p. 36). Unfortunately, Narang's equally significant observation that a "great impetus which stimulated the growth of the Sikh power and paved the immediate cause of its transition into a political organization was received from the persecution to which they were systematically subjected by the Muslim government of the day" has not received as much attention, thereby depriving him considerably of the credit for presenting the other side of the picture also. See *The Transformation of Sikhism*, p. 45.

[3]Prominent among them are M.A. Macauliffe, Teja Singh, Ganda Singh, Fauja Singh, A.C. Banerjee, etc.

[4]M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion,* vol. V, pp. 296-301.

[5]Fauja Singh, "Political Ideas of the Sikhs during the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries", *Punjab, Past and Present*, Oct. 1976, p. 279.

Nanak at the climax of his spiritual glory."[1] According to A.C. Banerjee, "in giving them (the Sikhs) direction and leadership, Guru Gobind Singh responded to the call of the history in a manner which was not at all inconsistent with the essence of Guru Nanak's teachings."[2] According to Gurbux Singh, there was an identity of purpose and a close similarity of motives between the two dissimilar phases of the same movement and complete absence of any sudden break in Sikhism which, hence, remained a continuous whole. The later development was only a vigorous application of the principles originally enunciated by Guru Nanak.[3]

As mentioned in the beginning, there are yet some other scholars whose views fall somewhere in-between those expressed by the advocates of the above mentioned three approaches. An element of a somewhat non-committal stance appears to be discernible on their part. Adopting a middle of the path approach, they feel that while there was nothing political in Nanak's message yet his reforms considerably paved the way for the political developments concerning Sikhism in the later stages. John Clark Archer, for instance, while asserting that Nanak himself seemed to give no thought to politics unless to reject it, felt inclined to express the view that yet there was something in him (Nanak), in his movement and in his times as he affected them, which was destined to be tested by political affairs of state.[4] Niharranjan Ray, while conceding that Guru Nanak was essentially a man of God dedicated to a religious way of life, to a quest of human spirit for union with the Absolute, Ultimate, feels that Nanak's life and message had, nevertheless, also a pronounced secular undertone and a direct social appeal which explains, in a large measure, why Sikhism could strike its roots very deep and wide as a religion and the Sikh society as an organized and effective body politic.[5]

Indubhushan Banerjee has stated that although the apparent ramifications of the Sikh movement might have seemed perfectly natural and to have been inspired by nothing but purely religious motives but, at the same time, looked at from the point of view of the established State, the new community was already reaching a position when it could no longer be treated with indifference, and the prospects of a conflict between the forces of the State and those of Sikhism were thus in the making for want of an approach "less liable to be misunderstood."[6]

[1]Cf. Ishar Singh, *Nanakism a New World Order,* p. 132.
[2]A.C. Banerjee, *Guru Nanak and His Times*, p. 208.
[3]Gurbux Singh, "The Role of Guru Nanak in History" in *Guru Nanak, His Life and Teachings*, ed., p. 196.
[4]John Clark Archer, *The Sikhs*, pp. 3-4, 105-6.
[5]Niharranjan Ray, *The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society*, p. 58.
[6]Indubhushan Banerjee, *Evolution of Khalsa*, vol. I, pp. 265-66; vol. II, p. 1.

Eminent historian and scholar, J.S. Grewal, while not endorsing the line of attributing direct political motives to Nanak and his immediate successors has, all the same, underscored Guru Nanak's concern over the people's problems, arising from the existing political milieu, which was fairly discernible in many of Nanak's observations. He has averred that Nanak's verses, "suggest a serious concern with politics", adding, however, that his political concern was intimately connected with his deeper concern for salvation.[1] J.S. Bains, while asserting that Nanak was primarily a social and religious thinker, however, suggests that even if he did not systematically probe into the affairs of the state, it is possible to form an idea of his reactions to political authority and of his conception of an ideal ruler.[2]

Thus different interpretations have been put by various scholars on the role of Guru Nanak and his successors—ranging from those terming it as completely apolitical or exclusively religious, at the one end, to those perceiving it to be essentially political or discerning in it at least the seeds of a political movement, on the other. Before arriving at any of our own conclusions which may synchronize with or differ from any of the existing views, it is necessary to study and analyse such aspects of Guru Nanak's philosophy as would help us in understanding the political contours, if any, of the movement and also to take into account his observations and comments on the contemporary political situations.

We may recapitulate here, even at the cost of some repetition, such aspects of the philosophy of Guru Nanak and his successors as may reasonably be deemed to have had some impact on the thinking of their followers in relation to the contemporary socio-political problems and conditioned their mind and approach in tackling them and, in the process, impinged on the politics of the day. The cardinal principles of Guru Nanak's religious philosophy are:

(i) Nanak's concept of universe recognizes the world as a spiritual or moral order, *Dharamsal*[3] or *Dharmkhand* (viz. the abode of righteousness) in which *dharma*, the Moral Law, sustains the universe in a moral equilibrium.[4] He was a preacher of the existence and operation of the Divine Law in this world which he described as 'God's house'.[5] This was fully projected in his hymns like 'Having created the living beings, God set the Moral

[1]J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*, pp. 165-66.

[2]J.S. Bains, "Political Ideas of Guru Nanak", *Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. XXIII, no. 4, p. 309.

[3]*Adi Granth*, Japji, Pauris 34-35—*Tis vich dharti thap rakhi dharmsal.*

[4]Ibid., Japji, p. 16—*Dhaul Dharam daya ka poot santokh thap rakhiya jin sut.*

[5]Ibid., p. 463—*Eh Jag Sache ki hai kothari, sache ka vich vas.*

Law in judgement over them[1] and 'man's actions, good or bad, are subject to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Moral Law.[2] Nanak's concept of Divine Law embodies a rule of morality, truth and justice. This, in fact, is the quintessence of his religious philosophy and constitutes the yardstick for measuring the correctness or otherwise of individual as well as collective action in all spheres of the society whether religious, social or political.

(ii) A very significant feature of Guru Nanak's philosophy and teachings is that Sikhism as a faith aimed at resolving the contradictions born out of divisions and schism in the human society. He repeatedly stressed that all men were equal in the eyes of God who was the common father of all.[3] The doctrine of equality of all is expressed succinctly in a characteristically popular hymn of the *Adi Granth:*

"Awal Allah nur upaya,
Kudrat ke sabha bande,
ek nur te sab jag upjaya
kaun bhale kaun mande."[4]

(The Lord first created light. All creatures are His production. From one light has sprung the entire universe. Why should we then divide human beings into the high and low.)

Guru Nanak's crusade against the code of Hindu Varnashrama-dharma, the caste system that differentiated man from man on the basis of birth, class or lineage, flowed from his firm belief in the equality of all men. Guru Nanak and the successor Gurus did not recognize any aristocracy of birth or privilege and made valiant efforts to transcend denominations of sects, religions and castes in search of spiritual democracy which affords equal opportunity to everyone to emerge to the fullest stature by sheer merit.

(iii) Guru Nanak and his successors laid utmost emphasis on the need for acquisition of knowledge, correct and independent thinking and fearlessness in the conduct of one's affairs. Their injunctions in this regard found ample expression in various *shlokas.* For instance, Nanak said: "With Guru's blessings, one may have right knowledge and ruminate over it. Honoured is he who learns and learns"[5] or again, "With intelligence serve thy God and

[1]Ibid., p. 463—*Nanak jia upae ke, likh navai dharam bahalya.*
[2]Ibid., Japji, p. 8—*Changiyan buriyan wache dharam hadur.*
[3]Ibid., pp. 223, 611.
[4]Ibid., Rag Prabhati, p. 1349.
[5]Ibid., p. 1329.

achieve honour; acquire knowledge and assimilate it; with intelligence impart it to others. This is the right way, else is evil, says Nanak."[1] The fifth Guru Arjun Dev also repeatedly stressed the importance of acquiring wisdom. He said "an individual's perception is dependent on the extent of his wisdom bestowed by God";[2] "Let god's grace destroy your ignorance, bestow knowledge and enlighten your mind";[3] "Only he who illuminates his own mind deserves to be called a pandit"[4] and "complete wisdom, penetrating vision and perpetual alertness are one's most important acquisitions which one should acquire by remembering God."[5]

Equal emphasis was laid by Nanak and his successors on the need for inculcating fearlessness. Nanak's hymns in praise of the Almighty carried a veiled message to shake off cowardice and dependence. Further, according to the Gurus, he who is imbued with the fear of the Lord, becometh fearless. Guru Arjun declared that 'A God's devotee is delivered of all his fears and freed from all shackles.[6]

(iv) Another characteristic feature of Nanak's teachings was his strong denunciation of the doctrine of renunciation. He declared himself positively in favour of a worldly life of acceptance of the duties and obligations of the human individual to the temporal and the material and an equal acceptance of the duties and obligations of religious discipline and spiritual quest for the Ultimate. By giving positive recognition to the demands, duties and obligations of secular life. Guru Nanak also recognized that human society was the centre of all moral and creative efforts of man. One must not run away from the society. Rather, through service alone one could get an honourable place in the divine court also.[7] Guru Nanak repeatedly pointed that spirituality need not be accompanied by renunciation of the world, self denial, enforced celibacy and self abnegation. Rather, it should be accompanied by strength of body and mind, living a full life in the midst of

[1]Ibid., p. 1245.

Akli sahib seviai, akli paaeai man;
Akli parh kai bujhia, akli keejai daan;
Nanak aakhai raaho iho, hor galan saitan.

[2]*Jaisi mat diye taisa prakash—Adi Granth*, 8, Sukhmani, 9.8.

[3]*Gian anjan gur diya, agiyan andher vinash*—Ibid., 23.1.

[4]*So pandit jo man prabodhe*—Ibid., 9.4.

[5]*Mat puri, amrit ja ki drisht* (Sukhmani, 22.8)—*Prabh ke simron gyan, dhiyan, tat, bodh* (ibid., 1.3)

[6]*Bhae to nirbhay hoi basana* (ibid., 17.2) and *Bandhan tor bhae nirvair* (ibid., 22.4)

[7]*Adi Granth*, p. 26.

active world and meeting the challenge of the time with courage and righteousness. Thus Nanak was a vehement critic of the other-worldly orientation of Jogis and Siddha recluses who equated religious living with a life of renunciation. He categorically stated that a truly religious man is one who acts on the religious plane in everyday life. It was through service alone that one could get an honourable place in the divine court, the only condition being that while being engaged in the affairs of the world, one must remain pure in the midst of the impurities of the world.

Since Guru Nanak aimed at bringing about a reconciliation of the religious and the secular he approved all honest occupations as consistent with religious life. The successor Sikh Gurus too sanctioned efforts for securing, through God's grace, prosperity and status[1] and laid stress on the welfare in both the worlds.[2] The highest worldly attainment was not incompatible with religious life. The life of disciplined worldliness could be combined with that of spiritualism, and the quest for riches and status in this world was also justified provided this was sought to be achieved through the path of righteousness as ordained by God.[3]

This emphasis on a unitary view of life which did not recognize any dichotomy between its various spheres of activity and laid stress on full participation in life and in the solution of its problems constitutes a corner stone of Guru Nanak's teachings.

Here, it may be mentioned that the basic approach of Guru Nanak was strictly adhered to and the tenets of his philosophy were held sacrosanct by the successor Gurus. The third Guru Amar Das, for instance, underscored the real character of this universe, as done earlier by Guru Nanak, by asserting that the world is the manifestation of God, man must live in it, work in it, participate in its affairs, fight evil and endeavour to make it an ideal place to live in.[4] The fourth Guru Ram Das underscored the unique place of *dharma* in the world order by stating that "the purpose of an individual's life is to strive hard for the triumph of righteousness in the world."[5] The largest contribution, in this context, was by the fifth Guru Arjun Dev who dwelt on all the

[1]*Prabh ke simre se jan parvan,*
Prabh ke simre se purakh pradhan,
Prabh ke simre se sarab ke raje (Sukhmani, 1.5).

[2]*Satguru Sikh ka halat, palat savare* (God ensures welfare of his devotee in both the worlds) (Sukhmani, 18.1).

[3]*O dhanvant, kulvant, patwant, jivanmukat jis riday Bhagwant. Adi Granth*, Sukhmani, 23.8.

[4]*Adi Granth*, p. 1017.

[5]Ibid., Rag Suhi, p. 773.

basic tenets, which were earlier postulated by Guru Nanak. He restressed that 'world is a manifestation of God'[1] and also emphasized the need for rational thinking, fearlessness and spiritual as well as temporal advancement.

Having summed up the basic tenets of Guru Nanak's teachings which were adhered to and carried forward by the successor Gurus, it would be in the fitness of things to draw some derivations flowing therefrom. The key note of the Sikh philosophy is brotherhood and equality of man. The Gurus stood for eradication of evils of enslavement, exploitation and encroachment on others' rights. Laying stress on the quality of fearlessness, Guru Nanak aimed at the liberation of man from fear of clericalism, shackles of ritualism and traditionalism and the awe of priestly domination or of an unjust social or political order. The Sikh religious ethos aimed at equipping man with moral and intellectual force and preparing the ground for moral regeneration which would stimulate man's capacity for self-assertion and self-defence. Further, the Sikh Gurus did not view religion in isolation from society and polity. The uniqueness of their message and social role lies in their ability to achieve the integration of matters, temporal and spiritual. For his disciples Nanak had visualized, and the successor Gurus had consolidated, a community given at once to temporal and spiritual pursuits of life. According to Bhagat Singh, the teachings of Nanak also implied that to facilitate the development of the best in an individual, a society and state need to be organized on the healthy base of justice, fellow feeling, liberty and equality, and must be free from oppression of any kind.[2]

The impact of this faith, imbued with such fine qualities of human behaviour and encompassing a comprehensive code for the individual and the society was deep on the immediate and long-term affairs of the Sikh faith. It not only raised Guru Nanak's followers into men of devout spiritualism but it also demanded an active engagement and unflinching commitment from them to relate themselves to the practical problems of humanity in all the major realms of life. The Sikh culture is essentially action oriented and lays great stress upon the dynamic principle of relatedness between man and God, man and society and man's secular needs and aspirations in the multifaceted panorama of life.

While the teachings of Guru Nanak were related to the spirituo-social uplift of society, there is also an extraordinary awareness in him of political issues of the day. A study of his compositions reveals the

[1] "*Sagal Samagri Tumre Sutra dhari*", Guru Arjun—Sukhmani Ashtapadi, 4, Pauri 8.

[2] Bhagat Singh, *Sikh Polity*, p. 318.

passions of a soul not only engrossed in consciousness of the divine but also of a man highly sensitive to the mundane and existential realities around, both social and political. In fact his observations on the prevailing political situations, apart from testifying to the critical awareness with which Guru Nanak surveyed the contemporary scene, also help one to reconstruct, together with other relevant evidence, the historical political milieu of his inspired utterances.

The birth of Guru Nanak took place during the reign of Sultan Bahlul Lodhi (1451-89) and the formative years of his life accordingly coincided with the period of Lodhi ascendancy under Bahlul and his son Sikandar. The half century preceding the accession of Sultan Bahlul had been, for the Punjab, a time of political instability accompanied by widespread violence and suffering. The invasion of Timur in 1398-99 had caused much damage to the Punjab and the years between 1421 and 1434 even considerably more. These were the years of Jasrat Khokhar of Sialkot, Faulad Turkbacha of Bhatinda and Sheikh Ali of Kabul. Their struggle for power and military adventures brought far more suffering in so far as their depredations were spread over a much wider area and over a lengthier period of time.[1] However, by 1469 the year of Guru Nanak's birth, Bahlul Lodhi had established his authority and introduced relative stability which was further strengthened by Sikander Lodhi.

Guru Nanak was a contemporary of the three Lodhi rulers i.e. Bahlul, Sikandar and Ibrahim as also of the Mughal Emperor Babar. Nanak was a keen observer, analyst and, to a certain extent, a chronicler (though not in a technical sense) of a sort. He took note of the prevailing political situation and the state of administrative affairs under the Lodhi rule. A significant contribution of Guru Nanak to history is the set of his four hymns collectively known as *Baburbani*. These hymns (while recorded in separate places in the holy *Granth* because of the *ragas* under which these fall) seem to be inspired by one or series of invasions by Babar and the sack of certain towns in Punjab, beginning in 1521,[2] and there is reference to the sack of Lahore in AD 1524. Guru Nanak gives us impressionistic details of the terrible bloodshed, burning of towns, loot, plunder, cruelty and suffering and dishonour of the

[1]Yahya-bin-Ahmed, *Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi,* tr. K.K. Basu, pp. 200-401; Nizam-ud-din Ahmed, *Tabaqat-i -Akbari*, tr. B. De, vol. I, pp. 300-321, see also K.S. Lal, *Twilight of the Sultanate*, pp. 84-113.

[2]This corresponds to the Samvat 1578 mentioned in one of these hymns, see *Adi Granth*, Tilang, p. 722.

womenfolk[1] at the hands of Babar's soldiery.[2] A Sufi of Babar's time, Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangoshi, has written in *Latif-i-Qudusi* an account of the Mughal raids into India. His description of destruction of towns like Shahbad and Dipalpur, centres of Islamic learning, and suffering of people accord with the transcript in Guru Nanak's hymns. The main concern of Guru Nanak, however, is not simply to record the details of an important historical event i.e., Babar's invasion and the consequent suffering but to reflect "the operation of the Divine Law which is of the utmost significance and all human events are subordinate to it." Moreover, his descriptions of agony and destruction have a tragic sense of compassion and pity, vividness and depth of feeling which can be explained only as an expression of a direct personal experience.

Apart from dwelling on the sufferings caused by Babar's invasion, Guru Nanak charged the Lodhi rulers for having failed to protect themselves and their subjects and to have "spoiled the priceless inheritance by their failure to meet the onslaught of the Mughal invaders." Guru Nanak refers to the shameful thoughtlessness of those wielding power in the hour of their authority. "These dogs have thrown away the jewels; shameful will be their end. None will remember them after death."[3]

Guru Nanak's vision of the contemporary political milieu, his awareness and attentiveness towards the malaise of the polity is more comprehensive and deeper than perhaps of any other medieval religious teacher. In Var Asa, Var Majh, Var Ramkali and Var Malar are recorded Shlokas of the *Adi Granth* which give us a first hand account of the deplorable conditions of the people under the Lodhis, the corrupt and exploitative nature of the ruling class, the priviledged and the powerful, the ignoble role of the rulers, their administrators and the dispensers of justice—all of whom were wielding power and indulging in pleasures in oblivion of God. The typical images in which Guru Nanak delineated the actions of the rulers, the officials and their lackeys are almost invariably drawn from the world of predatory animals fattening themselves on the suffering of the innocent masses who fell an easy prey like lambs to the whims and caprice of the wild lions in the

[1]An important feature of Guru Nanak's account of the atrocities committed by the invader is the suffering of people and women are alluded to without distinction of creed i.e. Hindus, Muslims, Bhattis, Rajput. *Adi Granth*, Rag Asa, pp. 417-18.

[2]These references occur in the *Adi Granth* (pp. 360-417, 418, 422, 423, 722, 723) in Asa 38, Asa Ashtapadi 12, Tilang 5 and are collectively known as *Babar-bani* hymns.

[3]*Adi Granth*, Rag Asa, p. 360.

jungle. Thus—"Rulers are like blood thirsty tigers, their officers hounds—disturbing all that are peacefully settled. Their servants wound others with their claws. You hounds suck blood and marrow as much as you may."[1]

In another passage Guru Nanak states: "Greed and sin together are the *raja* and *mehta*; falsehood is the *shiqdar*, lust is the *naib*, to give counsel they all conspire together."[2] The state officials (*shiqdars*) are compared to the tame deer and falcons that help their own species to be ensnared.[3] The ruling class is depicted by Guru Nanak as utterly selfish with no human pity or fear of God and living in pampered luxury, oblivious of their human obligations. Guru Nanak's overall assessment of his time is projected in one of his hymns. "The age has turned knife, the rulers are butchers, righteousness on wings has flown off."[4]

Several hymns in the *Adi Granth* affirm the inevitability of God's wrath where injustice and aggression have prevailed. According to Guru Nanak, the Lodhis had acted in a manner contrary to divine intention and used authority not for the service of mankind or God, but for self aggrandizement, practising cruelty for self glorification; as such they had to pay the inevitable price for their lack of responsibility and uprighteousness and go down the way of ruin because God's justice cannot be ignored. 'Should God turn away His glance of grace, he turns kings into blades of grass. Begging for alms, even they are denied that.[5] Thus about the Lodhis, Nanak writes: 'The wealth and sensuality which had intoxicated the rulers became their enemies. For, the messenger of death was given the command to strip them of their honour and carry them off. Had they paused to think in time, would they have received the punishment? But the rulers paid no heed and passed their time in revelry and now was Babar's command supreme: snatching each morsel from the pampered princelings.[6]

In a cosmic vision of the destruction of tyrants, Guru Nanak enumerates divine vengeance visiting each of these in age after age of human history. "The beloved Lord created Krishna in the form of child hero and gave him strength to drag by the hair the tyrants Kansa and Candur. The proud tyrants shall inevitably be destroyed."[7] It was in this context that Guru Nanak regarded the sufferings of Lodhis as the inevitable penalty for their misrule and high-handedness.[8]

[1]Ibid., Rag Malar, p. 1288.
[2]Ibid., Rag Asa, pp. 468-69.
[3]Ibid., Rag Malar, p. 1288.
[4]Ibid., Var Majh, p. 146.
[5]Ibid., p. 472.
[6]Ibid., p. 417.
[7]Ibid., p. 606.
[8]Ibid., pp. 417-18.

In consonance with his idea that the world is a spiritual and moral order, the state is also construed by Nanak as an indispensable part of the overall moral order. Hence, the affairs of state must be so conducted as to subserve the ends of the moral order. The rulers and the administrators of justice are the physical embodiment of the supreme moral law and their actions have to conform to the requirements of this law. They must perform their functions as a mandate from God. According to Guru Nanak, a true ruler is one who recognizes the truth. The mere fact of being the lord of any particular territory alone does not make a true ruler.[1] Both the rulers and their subordinates were enjoined upon by Nanak to be dispensers of justice and not to exercise their authority arbitrarily. Nanak struck what, in modern connotation, would be termed as a democratic idea when he urged upon the monarch to rule with the help of the representatives of the people, viz. *panches* or counsellors and this alone could make his rule long and lasting.[2] Guru Nanak expected a code of conduct from the rulers. In J.S. Grewal's words, "Guru Nanak expects certain norms of behaviour, both from the ruler and the ruled. The foremost duty of the ruler was to be just, both legally and morally. . . . From the functionaries of government, he expects honesty and integrity in the performance of their duties and consideration for common people".[3] J.S. Bains has also inferred Guru Nanak's concept of an ideal state and ideal ruler.

> The state should create conditions which may help the individual to further his personality. The good of the human being is the first duty of any constituted authority. The state is there for the individual and not vice versa. An ideal ruler must, therefore, be an embodiment of divine wisdom and he should always cater to the needs of the people. If he fails to fulfil his duties, he loses the mandate of God and his removal from power may be considered as a religious and moral duty.[4]

A significant point is the nature of the warning held out by Nanak, in the name of Moral Law, about the retribution which an inefficient, irresponsible, immoral and unjust ruler would have to suffer. He was of the view that God, in his anger, might chastise those kings, who digressed from their functions, by depriving them of political power. He hinted at God's will in the downfall of the wicked. (God exalts the righteous and pulls down the wicked).[5] Nanak's assertions that 'only

[1]Ibid., p. 1088.
[2]Ibid., p. 992.
[3]J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*, pp. 166-67.
[4]J.S. Bains, "Political Ideas of Guru Nanak", *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Oct-Dec. 1962, no. 4, p. 309.
[5]*Adi Granth*. Rag Gauri, p. 224.

those were qualified to rule who were fit to do so',[1] and that 'those who conferred authority on the undeserving were fools'[2] even appeared to be suggestive of an undeserving ruler forfeiting his right to rule. The fourth Guru Ram Das and the fifth Guru Arjun Dev also talked of God's punishment befalling the immoral tyrannical rulers. Guru Ram Das said: "If the rulers and kings indulge in luxuries and shun God's name, they will be caught by the hands of death; God's punishment will fall on them, and they will, then, raise their hands in repentence."[3] Guru Arjun Dev said: "The kings reap the reward of virtuous deeds done in previous lives. If their minds get perverted and they commit tyrannies on people, they will suffer long time chastisement."[4]

Implicit in these sayings of the first, fourth and fifth Gurus is the possibility of the social forces, which happened to be subjected to the rigours of a cruel, unjust and sectarian rule, seeing the justification, and regarding it as God's will, of ridding themselves of such a political set up in favour of a just and efficient rule. This point has attracted considerable attention of various scholars. Posing the question, "What was to be done if the rulers and their representatives failed in their duties", J.S. Grewal has averred that while there was no direct answer to this, but "his (Nanak's) condemnation of oppression and corruption, delivered in bold and clear terms may be taken as a form of answer. Further more, carried to its logical end, this attitude was capable of resulting in 'revolt', depending upon the nature and extent of 'oppression'."[5] According to Fauja Singh, "in the event of a ruler deviating from the path of justice and duty, the teachings of the Sikh Gurus regarded it just to rise against him with a view to effecting his removal from his position of authority, and gave the people the right to disobedience and rebellion in case of an unjust and tyrannical ruler who is beyond correction by other means."[6] Guru Nanak and his successor Gurus, while raising their voice against the oppression of the state, also warned the rulers of retribution and chastisement in the event of their failure to ensure a just and honest rule. In this context they also made the people conscious of their duty to ensure a just rule for themselves.

A matter of considerable importance in the study of the Sikh movement in the context of its political dimensions is the organizational aspect

[1]Ibid., Rag Meru, p. 1039—'*Takht bahe takhte ke laik*'.

[2]Ibid., p. 1286—Both are fools who confer authority on those that deserve not and shameless those who accept it.

[3]Ibid., p. 713.

[4]Ibid., p. 1356.

[5]J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*, p. 166.

[6]Cf *Punjab, Past and Present*, Oct 19[illegible], p. 276.

of the Sikh *panth* which helped the community to plunge into political action when they felt necessary to do so. It is interesting to note that Nanak had taken definite measures, in the first instance, only with a view to ward off the danger of his followers yielding to the pressure of Hindu orthodoxy. During the last two decades of his life time, Nanak set up a number of institutions in order to consolidate the fraternity, most important among them were: the establishment and continuation of the institutions of Guru-ship, the *sangat* (the holy assembly) and the *langar* (free common mess). The institution of Guru-ship as a unifying central authority played the most important role in promoting solidarity and cohesion within the Sikh movement. The character of the institution of Guru-ship in Sikhism (as discussed earlier) has been unique and 'collective commitment of the community to the trust of the Guru' strengthened bonds of comradeship and allegiance among the Sikhs.

The institutions of *langar* and *sangat,* which have been in operation ever since their inception by Guru Nanak and which were continued and further strengthened by the successor Gurus, also played an important role in keeping the Sikh society well knit and democratic. The *langar* which was introduced to serve as an instrument for inculcating a sense of equality and classlessness, also served the purpose of promoting fraternity among the followers of the faith. The Sikh *sangats* or congregations though they were primarily concerned with religious devotion and congregational worship, could perform a few secular functions as well. They started acting as a platform for Guru's followers to discuss their common weal and woe. With the passage of time the *sangats* acquired more and more functions with the widening of the range of interests of the Sikh movement. The *sangats* also developed among the Sikhs strong democratic traditions later practised by them in the eighteenth century, and they also gave the Sikhs a "philosophical conception of the community as a body through which the will of God manifests, also giving the Sikhs a conception of state and church."[1]

The *sangat* was deemed to be an embodiment of the Holy Guru and as such it was rendered sanctimonious by the Guru's presence in it. All members of the community, including women, were entitled to attend and participate in its deliberations. Different viewpoints could be and were expressed and discussed and the final consensus taken as the will of the Guru. The Hegelian concept of subordination of the individual will to the collective will is most complete in Sikhism. The general will exists here as a real will as a result of the belief that Guru is present in the *sangat,* and the opinion of the community is the will of Guru. It is this feeling which has given the Sikhs their political and

[1]K.M. Pannikar, *The Ideals of Sikhism*, p. 20.

social unity and their loyalty to the *panth*. The nucleus for the growth of the Sikh community with a distinctive and definite self identity of its own was provided in the life-time of Guru Nanak himself. The first four successor Gurus also devoted a great deal of their time and energies towards ideological, organizational and institutional fortification of the Sikh faith and the consolidation of the Sikh community.

It is evident that by the time of the fifth Guru, Guru Arjun, the Sikh faith and community had expanded in all directions and the testimony of Mohsin Fani is that, "during the time of each Mahal (Guru) the number of Sikhs increased till in the time of Guru Arjun, there were not many cities in the inhabited areas where some Sikhs were not present."[1] The numerical expansion of the ranks of the Sikhs and the organizational steps taken by the Gurus to ensure their solidarity and cohesion welded the Sikhs into a well-knit and well organized socio-religious organization, economically all but self-sufficient with distinct centres of worship. Guru-ship, along with the *Granth Sahib*, gave the Sikhs common focal points of symbolic unity, with obedience to both being regarded as a spiritual duty. Those who came under the influence of the Gurus were gradually brought into the fold of a well defined and integrated community, somewhat democratized in its organizational structure, conscious of comradeship in faith and with a distinctive *panthic* entity, inspired to resist tyranny and injustice and meet any challenge to its faith and yet basically adhering steadfastly to its strictly ethical and devotional manner of living.

The growing proportions of the Sikh movement, however, created some new problems in so far as interpretations of an ominous nature were put on them by those in and near to the seat of the Mughal power. The observations made by Guru Nanak on the political situations of his times on the nature of the rule, the tyranny and the corruption during the time of the Lodhis, and his account of the devastation caused by Babar's invasion and the consequent sufferings of the people have been taken by some scholars, as sufficient basis for their hypothesis of the so-called political nature of the Sikh movement. Guru Nanak's reminders to the rulers of the time about their duties to their subjects and the need for a just rule, coupled with his warnings about retributions to the erring rulers, have also been regarded as a further endorsement of this line of approach. Some subsequent developments under the successor Gurus have similarly been termed as indicators of temporal and political aspirations of the Sikh Gurus. The intensive social solidarity and cohesion coupled with the regalia that marked the 'Darbar' of the fifth Guru and reference to him as 'Sachha Padshah' by the devotees were not viewed with a benign eye by those near the seat of political

[1]Mohsin Fani, op. cit., p. 291.

power who discerned certain political ramifications in the Sikh *panth* involving possible threat to the existing political set up. The emergence of Amritsar as a great seat of Sikh activity, the activities of accredited representatives i.e. *masands* of the Guru and again the rebel prince Khusrao's meeting with Guru Arjun Dev, were characterised by the Guru's enemies as developments having political implications.

Interestingly as well as surprisingly enough, some modern historians have also been guided by a similar approach. They interpret the regalia and retinue of the fifth Guru Arjun as a novelty with disturbing political implications for the established state order of the Mughal rule and could not be treated with indifference. G.C. Narang, for example, writes, "a state peaceful and unobstrusive had been slowly evolved and with the Guru as its head as 'Sacha Padshah', the Sikhs had already become accustomed to a form of self government within the empire. Their power and prestige had been increased and they were fast becoming a factor in the political life of the province."[1] Sir J.N. Sarkar, termed Guru Arjun's execution as the punishment of a political offender and natural sequel to the emergence of a community; prone to regard their own Guru as the real temporal authority vis-a-vis the established regime.

However, such assertions when examined in the light of factual position, do not hold any tangible grounds. In the context of assessing the historical development of Sikhism and the attitude of Mughal Government to the Sikh Guru, the three issues which deserve a close scrutiny so as to avoid any facile interpretations being put on them are: (i) the alleged setting of a temporal domain by Guru Arjun Dev and to have donned the title of 'Sacha Padshah'; (ii) The meeting between Guru Arjun Dev and Rebel prince Khusrau; and (iii) the donning of the two swords of *piri* and *miri* by Guru Hargobind. With regard to the first it is crucial to note that there is no evidence in the *banis* of the fifth Guru Arjun Dev, of there being any political motive behind the title of 'Sacha Padshah'. Moreover, it would in fact appear from the writings of the Gurus and especially from those of bards who began to write since the time of second Guru that reference to God or Guru as 'Sacha Padshah', to his seat as *takht* (throne) and to the assembly of his followers as darbar (court) were not later innovations but used from the beginning. In fact, phrases like 'Sacha Padshah' (True King) and 'Patshahi-Patsha' (King of Kings) were used by Guru Nanak himself as metaphors referring to God. Similarly, references were made by him to God having His throne (*takht*), court (darbar) and palace (*mahal*).[2]

[1]G.C. Narang, *The Transformation of Sikhism*, p. 37

[2]Phrases, like 'Sacha Padshah', 'Padshahi, Padshah', 'Mera Padshah' occur in Rag Asa and phrases like *dargah*, *takht*, *mahal*, 'darbar' occur in Sri Rag and

J.S. Grewal has averred that "the most consistent and probably the most significant use of such metaphors by Guru Nanak relates to God; the true king, the king of kings, my king. He has His court, His throne and His palace. . . . To find honour in His court is the aim of human life".[1]

The point which emerges from the above is that in Nanak's conception the terms 'Sacha Padshah', *takht,* 'darbar' etc. had no temporal and much less political connotation, and their continued adoption and use by the successor Gurus is to be seen in the same light. According to Mohsin Fani,[2] the Sikhs called the Guru 'Sacha Padshah' (the True King) as against the temporal king who ruled only by the force of arms and concerned himself with the worldly actions of the people. For Cunningham,[3] 'Sacha Padshah' or True King is the spiritual king or the Guru who rules the eternal soul or guides it to salvation while a temporal monarch controls our finite faculties only or puts restraints upon the play of our passions and enjoyment of the senses. The Mohammedans have the same idea and a corresponding term viz. *Malik-e-Hakiki* (The Real Master).

The use of expressions like 'Sacha Padshah', *takht* or 'darbar' did not by itself indicate a political ideal and Guru Arjun was neither undertaking any imperial authority or royal powers and nor was he at all interfering with the state affairs. The Guru never asked the Sikhs to withdraw their allegiance from the state or to show disregard to the authority and the law of the Mughal government. However, the use of the term 'Sacha Padshah' for the Guru was exploited by the detractors of the Sikh faith. They conveyed to the Emperor that the title of 'Padshah' was the exclusive privilege of the Mughal king and by allowing the Sikhs to use the same for him, Guru Arjun had assumed the royal title. In reality, however the fifth Guru's devotees only reverentially referred to him as 'Sacha Padshah', regarding him as God's reflection,[4] because Sikh culture posited the idea of true king (Sacha Padshah) as the title with which it invested its core concept of Godhead.

As regards the so called political connotations of Guru Arjun Dev's meeting with prince Khusrau, it would be in order to note that it has been generally the wont of kings and those belonging to the royal family to undertake visits of homage or of casual nature to the sages

Gauri.

[1]J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*, p. 148.

[2]Fani, op. cit.

[3]J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 317.

[4]The phrase 'Satguru Sachcha Padshah' occurs quite frequently in the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas. For instance *Var* 1, Pauri 45;*Var* 26, Pauri 21.

of their times. Akbar himself had visited Guru Amar Das at Goindwal and subsequently also met Guru Arjun Dev. Regarding the episode of prince Khusrau's meeting with Guru Arjun, stories were made current at that time, apparently to impart a political tinge to the meeting, that the Guru had offered prayers for the success of Khusrau[1] and that he had provided a goodly sum to the refugee prince. The fact, however, is that the Guru was not interested in any claimant to the throne and Khusrau, 'if he ever met the Guru, must have gone to him casually as all men in trouble do, hoping apparently that this would bring him good luck.'

It would be relevant in this context to refer here at some length to the activities of both the Hindu detractors of Guru Arjun and of the Muslim orthodox elements. The former harboured a strong bias against the Guru personally, while the latter were disturbed over the increasing popularity and the growing dimensions of the Sikh movement, more particularly the advance made under the pontificate of the fifth Guru. The Hindu detractors, notably Dewan Chandu Shah and Prithia (Guru Arjun's elder brother who had been overlooked in the matter of conferment of Guru-ship), had been active during the time of Akbar also. In league with orthodox Muslim elements they had been carrying complaints against the Guru. Guru Ram Das was quite alarmed at the activities of the detractors and there was a strong reaction among the Sikhs the nature of which is clearly discernible in the hymns of the fourth and fifth Gurus. Specifically there are warnings in the *Adi Granth* against those who had deserted the true path and set themselves as rivals to divinely appointed teachers i.e., Gurus. The Gurus were conscious of the grave situation created by the rivals and safeguarded against all possible dangers from detractors. Efforts at morale boosting had to be undertaken to nourish the internal cohesiveness of the Sikhs, partly by reassuring and emphasizing the position of the Guru and partly by condemning those who had deserted the Sikh *panth*.

Thus —"They who turn their face against the True Guru shall find neither house nor home. They shall wander from door to door like divorced women of bad character and evil reputation... They who receive pardon through being instructed by the True Guru shall be blended with the Lord."[2] The foregoing passage seemed to be addressed to those who had once been Sikhs. Yet other verses were equally

[1]It was customary for Guru to bless those who visited him—Emperor Jahangir, states in his *Memoirs* that he called for Guru Arjun on account of the charge brought against him that he had put a saffron mark on the forehead of the rebel Khusrau as a token of his blessings. Refer to Persian text of the *Memoirs* printed in *Makhiz-i-Twarikh-i-Sikhan*, ed. Ganda Singh, Amritsar, 1949, pp. 20-22.

[2]*Adi Granth*, p. 233.

harsh on the disciples of false Gurus. For example, "The disciples whose spiritual preceptor is blind perform blind deeds. They act in accordance with their own will and continually utter the grossest lies. They practise falsehood, deception and slander. They and their families are drowned, whatever yoke the Lord puts on them that remains; what can these creatures do."[1] In a more intense strain, Guru Ram Das says: "They who leave the Guru shall find no entrance into God's court. Let anyone go and meet those slanderers and he will see their faces pale and spat upon. They who are accursed of the Guru are accursed of the whole world and shall ever be vagrants."

The death of the fourth Guru Ram Das in 1581 saw a further intensification of the activities of the detractors and the rise of a schismatic sect within the broad framework of the Sikh religion.

Guru-ship had descended on Guru Nanak as God's grace according to the evidence of Nanak himself. Here was a case of spiritual succession (this aspect of Guru-ship has earlier been discussed) and before his death Guru Nanak had nominated Lehna, and transmitted to him the 'voice and word of God'. In the case of second, third and fourth Gurus, Guru Angad, Guru Amar Das and Guru Ram Das—the office of Guru-ship had been conferred by selection and nomination from among the disciples who in each case possessed spiritual qualities and had earned the reputation of single-minded devotion to the master and the *panth*. Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, while being qualified to head the *panth* by virtue of his spiritual attainments also, coincidentally happened to be the son of the fourth Guru Ram Das and, from this time, the institution of Guru came to stay on hereditary principles. This development was viewed with apprehension by those near to the seat of Mughal power as also by the detractors of the Sikh faith who apparently imparted a political hue to this development. Niharranjan Ray also goes to the extent of interpreting this deviation in the mode of selection of Guru-ship as a manifestation of the political character of Sikh movement. That "the institution was made hereditary has certainly a socio-political significance in so far as it indicated the adoption of the hereditary principle of succession of the temporal institution of kingship. Guru Ram Das, the fourth Guru, was still only the spiritual king of the Sikh community but his son Guru Arjun was the Sacha Padshah that is king spiritual as well as king temporal."[2] The statement needs to be refuted on two grounds. First the adoption of the principle of hereditary succession for Guru-ship did not necessarily signify any political orientation of this institution because the Guru was looked upon by his disciples not as a worldly lord or a sovereign

[1]Ibid., p. 951.
[2]Niharranjan Ray, *The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society*, p. 46.

but a spiritual guide. Secondly, the concept of assumption of title of Sacha Padshah also did not have any political connotation but constituted the core-concept of Godhead and Guru Arjun as such was recognized formally as spiritual head of the Sikh community.

Another significant aspect is that conceptually speaking the principle of hereditary succession may have been against the very conception of the institution of Guru and perhaps had socio-psychological consequences. But it stands out very clearly that, like his predecessors, Guru Ram Das chose his successor purely on considerations of strict merit, obedience and dedication to the Sikh ideals. Bypassing his elder sons, Prithi Chand and Mahadeva, he selected the youngest son, Arjun Dev, who at the age of 18, was found eminently qualified for shouldering the spiritual and social responsibilities of Guru-ship and nurturing the fast developing community under his stewardship. The installation of Arjun Dev as the fifth Guru in 1581 caused resentment and bitterness to his eldest brother Prithia (Prithi Chand), who had claimed the Guru-*gaddi* as a primo-geniture right and tried his level best to influence the decision of Guru Ram Das in his own favour. But the Guru remained as firm in regard to the issue of succession as he had been all through his life in dealing with detractors of Sikhs. Guru Ram Das also composed a hymn upholding the right of only the most worthy to the spiritual sovereignty of Guru-ship. Thus he states, "God in the beginning bestowed on his saints the ambrosial store house of saint-ship. The fool who tries to rival them shall have his face blackened in this world and the next. They are saints, they are worshippers to whom God's name is dear. God is obtained by their service, ashes shall be thrown on the slanderer's head. In the course of four Gurus, none hath ever obtained Guru-ship by revilings, it is by God's service that Guru-ship is obtained."[1] Thus Guru Ram Das proclaimed emphatically the irrevocability of his decision and utter futility of all slanderous protests of Prithia to whom the Guru said: "Thou are a *mina* (deceitful) my Sikhs will never obey thee and will never associate with thee."[2]

The application of the name *mina* to Prithia's followers is to be found in *Dabistan* also.[3] Tensions in the form of dissent were prevalent

[1]*Adi Granth*, p. 733.

[2]See Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 36, Bhai Gurdas takes a very serious notice of the *minas*. Virtually a whole *Var* consisting of 21 stanzas relates to them and they are loudly denounced in very strong terms. The true Guru Arjun is the true king the *mina* Prithia's face has been blackened. Again *minas* are like false coins. They claim to be Gurus but possess no merit. See Bhai Gurdas, *Var* 36, stanzas 7, 8, 9.

[3]Mohsin Fani, op. cit., p. 273. By the time Mohsin wrote his *Dabistan*, the succession of Guru Arjun had been universally accepted but the memory of Prithia's hostility still lingered in the public mind and his followers survived as

within the Sikh community earlier also. Guru Angad had to leave Kartarpur which was claimed by the sons of Guru Nanak, Guru Amar Das had to leave Khadur which was claimed by Dasu and Dattu, the sons of Guru Angad, and Guru Ram Das left Goindwal for Ramdaspur which was chosen for him by Guru Amar Das, whose sons claimed Goindwal. Thus even before Prithia there were many disappointed claimants to Guru-ship among the sons of the preceding Gurus. The dissent of Prithia was different in character from the opposition offered by the sons of the former Gurus to their nominated successors. None of them had taken his grievance so seriously and made himself so active and vocal a dissenter as Prithia, the disgruntled elder brother and rival of Guru Arjun. Prithia somehow could never reconcile to Arjun's accession to Guru-ship and put impediments in the smooth working of Guru Arjun's mission as head of the Sikh community. For sometimes he succeeded in effecting an economic blockade of Guru's household, cornering all the supplies and collections brought in by the *masands* and disciples, and cleverly sending streams of visitors to the Guru's *langar* for free food.[1]

In fact, Prithia indulged in all sorts of intrigues to damage the position of Guru Arjun with the connivance and support of Sulahi Khan, the revenue official of Lahore. Prithia tried to set up a parallel establishment of Guru-ship,[2] obstructing and maligning every activity of Guru Arjun. Through his machinations Prithia even succeeded in inducing Sulahi Khan to attempt an attack upon the Guru. The attack was, however, rendered abortive by the accidental fatal fall of Sulahi Khan into a live kiln on the way. The strong Sikh tradition regarding the intrigues of Dewan Chandu Mal of Lahore, who bore ill-will to Guru Arjun on account of the latter's refusal to accept the hand of his daughter for his (Guru's) son, Hargobind, also points to the part played by the personal factor in fortifying the anti-Sikh forces in the country.

Equally inimical and damaging were the detractors led by orthodox Brahmins who encouraged desertions from Guru's establishment.[3] The Hindu orthodoxy was unhappy about the progress of Sikhism because

sect. Later Guru Gobind Singh directed Sikhs to have no dealing with *minas*. The sect is now extinct but its unhappy reputation lives on.

[1]The situation was squarely tackled by some of the veteran disciples of Guru Arjun and preceding Gurus including Bhai Gurdas, the first scholar and interpreter of Sikhism and Bhai Buddha (lit. revered old man) who had the honour of anointing the *tilak* mark on the forehead of four Gurus at their respective succession ceremonies.

[2]There is a reference to a land grant by Sulahi Khan to Prithia to set up a parallel Guru-ship. See *Gurbilas Padshahi Chhevin*, p. 45.

[3]There is ample evidence in the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas about reactionary attitudes of Hindu orthodoxy.

it was essentially anti-Brahminical. The Brahmins felt that owing to the egalitarian nature of Guru Nanak's creed, their position was being undermined and that their hold on the Hindu masses had weakened. Therefore, they were severely critical of the Sikhs and Sikh Gurus and utilized every opportunity to lodge complaints against them with the Mughal State. The preparation of a separate Sikh scripture seriously upset the Brahminical orthodoxy and they complained to the Emperor Akbar that the *Adi Granth* compiled by Guru Arjun was seditious in tone and full of malicious attacks on Islam and Hinduism. The emperor made a personal investigation into the matter and the examination of the contents of the *Adi Granth* not only fully satisfied him but he also appreciated the eclectic nature of the Sikh scripture, thus dismissing the complaint as unfounded, and also met Guru Arjun at Goindwal on his way back to Agra and remitted the Land Tax for the agriculturists of Punjab whose sufferings were brought to the emperor's notice by Guru Arjun Dev.[1]

Akbar's gesture of goodwill towards the Sikhs led to a sharp reaction among the conservative sections of the Muslim population who perceived a threat in the rapidly growing proportions of the Sikh movement and became openly hostile to it. The main reason for this seems to be that the growth of Sikhism blocked further progress of Islam in Punjab. Islam had entered the Punjab in the wake of the Turkish conquest and by now had converted a sizeable section of the local population (particularly from lower castes). With the progress of Sikhism, which was also a missionary creed like Islam, the pace of Islamization was considerably slowed down, if not halted. The prospects of improved status which Islam offered to the lower sections of the Hindu society were now available from Sikhism as well because Sikhism too like Islam was an egalitarian religion and made no distinction between the high and the low. Since it was closer to the roots of the Hindu culture, for the Hindu masses it had an edge over Islam. Therefore, those who wanted to change their religion with a view to improving their position in the society, preferred Sikhism to Islam. Thus the pace of the spread of Islam seemed to have been slowed down. Some of the Muslims too, generally former converts from Hinduism, began to show more interest in Sikhism than in Islam.[2] It is possible that a few cases of reconversion also took place. All these developments naturally alarmed the orthodox elements of the Muslim population and they became progressively hostile to Sikhs because the Sikh movement to them was the growth

[1]*Akbarnama*, vol. III, pp. 514-15; also Sujan Rai Bhandari, *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh*, p. 425.

[2]There is a definite reference to it in *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*. See also for details *Makhiz-i-Twarikh-i-Sikhan*, ed. Ganda Singh, p. 21.

of a dangerous heresy which needed to be nipped in the bud. However, the Muslim orthodoxy could cause no immediate harm to the Sikh movement in view of Akbar's enlightened liberalism and policy of *Suleh-kul* (peace with all). Akbar's magnanimity towards the Sikh Gurus not only assured them of protection against the state or any individual or group of individuals interfering in their activities but also helped them materially through the emperor meeting the Sikh Gurus and making gifts and grants to them.[1] In fact it is generally recognised that Akbar's objective stance not only provided a congenial atmosphere for the progress and stabilization of the position of the Sikh *panth* but also saved it from the fury of the Muslim orthodoxy led by Shaikh Faizi Sarhindi.

The peaceful evolution of the Sikh *panth* into a distinctive socio-religious order under the first four successor Gurus during the sixteenth century took place in a politico-administrative framework marked by relative peace and non-interference. The situation, however, changed with Jahangir's accession to the throne when there was a reassertion of Islamic orthodoxy. Not only Jahangir did not oppose the Muslim orthodoxy but also felt obliged to them for their help in ascending the throne and hence harboured a soft corner for them. The Muslim orthodoxy was conscious of this and was intent on wresting the price for their help. Jahangir's approach to the Sikh movement under the leadership of Guru Arjun Dev was thus conditioned by his own bias against it, on the one hand, and his predilection to oblige the Muslim orthodoxy, on the other. He felt that the new Punjabi religious group was a threat to Islamic dominance and involved a possible threat to the existing political set-up. Jahangir's predetermined attitude was clearly discernible in the account in his memoirs, the *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*; thus:

> There lived at Goindwal on the bank of river Beas a Hindu named Arjun in the garb of a *pir* or shaikh so much so that he had by his ways and manners captivated the hearts of many simple minded Hindus, nay, even of foolish and stupid Muslims. . . who called him Guru. From all directions, fools and fool-worshippers were attracted towards him and expressed full faith in him. For three or four generations they had this shop warm. For years the thought had been presenting itself to me that either I should put an end to this false traffic or he should be brought into the fold of Islam. When this news (of the Guru having shown special favour to Prince

[1]The present site of Amritsar was granted to Guru Amar Das for his daughter when Akbar met the Guru at Goindwal. On a subsequent occasion the emperor met Guru Arjan Dev at Goindwal on his way back to Agra and at his request remitted the land revenue of the area for a whole year. These meetings greatly enhanced the prestige of the Gurus in the estimation of the people in general and were naturally instrumental in the further advancement of the Sikh cause.

> Khusrau) reached my ears, I fully knew his heresies, I ordered him to be brought into my presence and having made over his house, dwelling places and children to Murtaza Khan and having confiscated his property. I ordered that he should be put to death with tortures.[1]

The precarious equation between the Mughal state and the Sikh religion was thus disturbed because of the opposition and activities of Hindu detractors of Gurus and Muslim orthodoxy. Both played an important role in building the Mughal state's bias against the Guru and which ultimately led to Guru Arjun's execution in 1606. The satisfaction of the Muslim orthodoxy over Guru Arjun's execution was in evidence in a letter written by Shaikh Faizi Sirhindi[2] to Murtaza Khan, the Subedar of Lahore, saying:

> The execution, at this time, of the accursed Kafir of Goindwal. . . with whatever motive. . . is an act of grace for the followers of Islam.[3]

The Guru's martyrdom was thus the direct result of the policy of religious persecution by the government of the day. This is proved by Guru Arjun Dev's refusal to submit to Jahangir's demand to effect alterations in the *Adi Granth* and the Guru's indication to his followers of his resolve to sacrifice his life in defence of the faith and to set an example to others. The argument that Guru Arjun was involved in propping up the cause of rebel Prince Khusrau falls flat as historically unsound, and "later, Jahangir seemed to have been convinced that he had been misled in handling the case of Guru Arjun Dev".[4]

It can hence be inferred that an over-cautious and unduly apprehensive approach of the rulers of the time, fed by a preconceived bias, aided and abetted both by Muslim orthodox elements and the Hindu detractors, was considerably responsible for perceiving political implications in the Sikh movement. However, some of its organizational features like the *masand* system, the organization of *sangats*, coupled with terminologies like 'Sacha Padshah', 'darbar' etc. could have been easily and subjectively regarded as something beyond all ordinary

[1] *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, p. 35.

[2] Shaikh Ahmed Sarhindi, 'Mujaddad-i-Alf Sani' was the very antithesis of Akbar and Abul Fazl and was akin to Badauni in the desire to 'imprison the mind in the narrowest theological vision'. Naturally, he was a severe critic of Akbar's policy of toleration towards non-Muslims. He writes of the miserable conditions of the Muslims under him and calls Akbar "an enemy (lit. denier or forbidder) of the faith of Islam". *Maktubat-i Imam Rabbani*, vol. I, letter no. 47. Also see Irfan Habib's article on Shaikh Ahmed Sirhindi, Enquiry no. 5.

[3] Cf. *Maktubat-i Imam Rabbani*, vol. II, part III, letter no. 193.

[4] Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *A Short History of Sikhs*, p. 41.

consideration and which could no longer be treated with indifference. All these factors combined to act as the *raison d'etre* for adoption of steps to curb the movement and led the execution of Guru Arjun. In the words of Mohammad Latif "The death of Guru Arjun was a great turning point in the history of the Sikh community for it inflamed the religious passions of the Sikhs and it was at this time that those seeds of hatred of the Muslim power were sown which took such deep roots in the minds of all the faithful followers of Nanak."[1] The death of Guru Arjun was regarded as a martyrdom and the tragedy stunned the whole Sikh community, producing a strong wave of indignation against the official high-handedness and tyranny. It had serious psychological and political ramifications. It was interference by the state that led to the development of 'anti-establishment' stance of Hargobind and successor Gurus as also the necessity of forging a defensive mechanism to protect the community from further persecutions of a hostile state. There can be no doubt that the decision to arm the community was taken by Guru Hargobind and the community collectively after Guru Arjun had been martyred. If the church of Guru Nanak was to be kept alive, the Sikhs had to give attention to the development of physical strength along with spiritual attainments. Guru Nanak himself had condemned cowardice as an encouragement to *zulum*, injustice and cruelty over the weak and helpless. According to him, "If a powerful person were to attack another powerful person, there would be no ground for grievance, but if a ferocious lion were to fall upon a herd of cattle the master (the protector) of the herd would have to answer for it."[2] In equally strong language Guru Nanak had upbraided the so-called masters of herd, the Lodhi Sultans of India, for not manfully standing up for the defence of their subjects.

Such sayings and other admonitions by Guru Nanak had come down as a heritage to Guru Hargobind who succeeded Guru Arjun after the latter's execution under orders of the Emperor Jahangir. Guru Hargobind and the Sikh community felt that a stage had come in the development of the Sikh faith when it should vindicate Nanak's message of resisting the evil of tyranny. Bhai Gurdas refers to the martial response of Guru Hargobind to the martyrdom of his father as 'hedging the orchard of the Sikh *panth* with the hardy and the thorny kikar tree'. Thus the changed political dispensation in the post Akbar period was responsible for the new orientation of the Sikh movement which combined spiritual growth with resistance to oppression. Henceforth, the Sikhs were fortified with the idea of being a strong and well-knit community, capable of rising as one man for the defence of their faith

[1]M. Latif, *History of the Punjab*, p. 22.
[2]*Adi Granth*, Asa, p. 360.

against any persecution.

Moreover, since Guru Hargobind took over the Guru-ship under the shadow of a changed situation he was also obliged to bring about a change in the ceremony of the installation of the Guru. He told Bhai Budha that the *seli*, a woollen cord worn as a necklace or twisted round the head by the former Gurus, was not to be used in future and his *seli* would be the sword belt. The young Guru took the seat of his father with two swords girdled round his waist, one to symbolize temporal power and the other spiritual power i.e., *miri* and *piri*. The donning of the swords of *miri* and *piri* by Guru Hargobind was a direct consequence of Jahangir's policy of persecution of which the martyrdom of Guru Arjun was the crassest example. The co-mingling of the secular and religious motifs was considered necessary in a situation which demanded self defence. According to Mohsin Fani, Guru Hargobind "had seven hundred horses in his stables, three hundred cavaliers and sixty artillery men were always in his service."[1] This was the first corps of Sikh volunteers raised by the Guru at Amritsar. Yet with all this defensive military apparatus, the Guru was primarily a saint, sixth in the line of spiritual inheritance from Guru Nanak who had permitted no aggression against any one. Guru Hargobind's decision to militarize the *panth* was not prompted by any narrow temporal considerations, he had no political objectives to achieve; and the military character imparted to the Sikh movement was purely for self-defence. For adopting the new approach, the Guru gave a very convincing explanation to the Maratha saint Samrath Ram Das at Srinagar in Garhwal. He was on his way to Nanakmata when saint Ram Das met him during his pilgrimage toward Badri Narayan in about 1634. Ram Das was surprised to see Guru Hargobind armed and riding a horse accompanied by a large number of followers. Apparently not being able to reconcile the two seemingly opposite aspects of Guru Hargobind's profile of a saint-cum-soldier, he asked the Sikh Guru, "I had heard that you occupy the *gaddi* of Guru Nanak. Nanak was a *tyagi* Sadhu, who had renounced the world. You are wearing arms and keeping an army and horses. You allow yourself to be called 'Sacha Padshah'—a True King. What sort of a Sadhu are you?" Guru Hargobind replied, "(I am) internally a hermit and externally a prince. Arms mean protection for the poor and helpless and destruction for the tyrant. Guru Nanak had not renounced the world but had renounced *maya*, the self and ego". Samrath Ram Das was pleased to hear this and said: "This appeals to my mind."[2] It is said that Samrath Ram Das told Hargobind in his parting words that the latter had already got the right type of instruction and advice from the great master Nanak and that he needed

[1]Fani, op. cit., pp. 235-36.
[2]Cf. *Punjab Sakhian*, Sakhi 39.

none from him.

Certain Western scholars[1] have regarded the use of physical force during the pontificate of Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh, even if such use was necessitated by the prevailing circumstances, as a sharp dividing line between spiritualism and the absence of it. They project the physical confrontations of the Sikhs, during the Guru-ships of Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh, with the Mughals as a complete negation of the heritage of the first five Gurus. To them the military activity of the sixth and the tenth Gurus appeared to be a deviation from the teachings of Guru Nanak.

It would appear necessary in this context to sort out two crucial issues: (i) spiritualism *vis-à-vis* use of force under certain specific circumstances, and (ii) spiritualism *vis-à-vis* socio-political concerns.

Coming to the issue of spiritualism *vis-à-vis* use of physical force, there are some who consider use of force as completely out of place even if it becomes unavoidable in the process of picking up gauntlet against injustice and tyranny. It is on this basis that even an eminent scholar like J.N. Sarkar has stated that his (Nanak's) aims were abandoned when his successors in the leadership of the Sikhs set up a temporal domain for themselves and made military drill take the place of moral self-reform and spiritual growth.[2] Sarkar has also attributed to poet Rabindranath Tagore the view that Guru Gobind Singh 'converted the spiritual unity of the Sikhs into a means of worldly success; he dwarfed the unity of a religious sect into an instrument of political advancement.'[3]

The validity of these premises and the hypotheses based thereupon needs a strict scrutiny because such an approach ignores a basic as well as crucial point that enforced use of violence for a right and just cause cannot be seen in isolation from the fundamentals enshrined in a given faith or be considered as a departure from its spiritual tenets. Lord Krishna, the exponent of the Bhakti and Sankhya Yoga (Knowledge) in the *Bhagavadgita*, also advocated a life of action (Karmayoga) and urged Arjuna to take up arms for the protection of his right and to fight against injustice.

In this context, it is significant to note that Guru Gobind Singh himself while wanting Banda Bairagi (Madho Das Bairagi) to give up his life as a hermit and instead take up the "battle of Dharma", which was then being fought in the Punjab, invoked the memories of the days when, in this very land, Lord Krishna had taught man "the primacy of action". Guru Gobind Singh, in the same context, reminded

[1]Among these are western scholars like John B. Noss, Arnold Toynbee, Fredrick Pincott and Indian scholars like Sir J.N. Sarkar.

[2]J.N. Sarkar, *History of Aurangzeb*, vol. III, p. 302.

[3]Ibid., p. 301.

Banda Bairagi of the task that had beset Guru Nanak viz., "to restore to man the greatness that is man's. To make man protest against tyranny and injustice." The Guru also revealed to the Bairagi his reasons for adopting the cult of the sword: "when tyranny reigns supreme, it is no use slipping rosary beads through your fingers and meditating over issues of soul and Brahma in remote forest groves." He added that is the time when "every sant must wield the sword."[1]

Guru Gobind Singh's aim was to serve the cause of righteousness and, more specifically, to protect the Dharma enunciated by Guru Nanak. In his compositions one finds the same insistence on the worship of the one True Lord, the same delineation of devotion and surrender and the same glorification of Name as found in Guru Nanak's hymns. "The core of Sikhism remained unaffected by the political turmoil through which its votaries passed under his leadership during seventeenth century."

The idea behind militarization was expressed by Guru Gobind Singh in his words; "Take the broom of divine knowledge into thy hand and sweep away the filth of timidity... and meditate war only with God's name on your lips."[2] There is absolutely no ground to suggest that Guru Gobind Singh adopted the course of confrontation by turning his back on the basic philosophy of his mentor, Guru Nanak. He clarified this point in his *Dasam Granth* on more than one occasion—"The Divine God has sent me for the sake of Dharma, ordering me to spread the faith everywhere and to subdue evil doers."[3] He underscored the underlying base of virtue for his resort to use of force in an another verse. "May this be Your blessing on me that I never refrain from good deeds. May I fight without fear and with confidence in victory."[4] That he was fighting for the sake of Dharma was vividly evident in a letter from Guru Gobind Singh to Aurangzeb. "God who hath given you the reign of vast territory, hath bestowed upon me the duty of saving Dharma. Your means are falsehood and deceit, while mine are faith in God and Truth."[5] It is clear that Guru Gobind Singh's objective in instituting the Khalsa was to reaffirm the faith of Guru Nanak and to meet any challenge of interference presented to the Sikh

[1]Cf. P. K. Nijhawan, *Sri Guru Gobind Geeta*, pp. 78-79.
[2]M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, vol. V, p. 167.
[3]Guru Gobind Singh, *Bachittar Natak*, pp. 51-54.
[4]*Dasam Granth*, p. 99.
[5]*Hamu kih tura padshahi bidad;*
Mra daulte din panah bidad;
Tura turk tazilmakro ria;
Mra chara sazi bsidko safa
(*Fateh nama*—Guru Gobind Singh, verses 3-4, 14-15.)

panth.

Another point to be taken note of is that Guru Gobind Singh, though forced to adopt a course of defensive confrontation, refrained from building a state on the basis of religion. In fact, he was fighting Aurangzeb for the same reason namely that the religion must not be a basis for the state.

The non-sectarian, non-denominational and non-temporal approach of Guru Gobind Singh is reflected clearly in his verses like "The temple and the mosque are the same. The Hindu and the Muslim forms of worship are the same. All men are the same."[1] He was against identifying the church with the state and wanted the two to be kept separate. "The house of Baba (Nanak) and of Babar, both derive the authority from God himself. Recognise the former as supreme in religion, and the latter supreme in secular affairs."[2]

Earlier, Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, who took to arms to defend his faith, fought several battles but none from the Akal Takht (the spiritual secular seat of supreme Sikh authority which he had himself brought into being). Rather he fought the battles from Lohgarh, a fortress he had built some three miles away. He too had never staked a claim to a theocratic state. In fact, it was the martyrdom of Guru Arjun that made the Sikhs realize the urgency of self-defence. The steps introduced by Hargobind did not mark any abrupt change. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, had condemned cowardliness and applauded the qualities of self-respect, confidence and manliness.[3] The basis of the Sikh dynamics in the temporal domain consisted in the recognition that in the world of social relations, the man of God must put up resistance to evil and induce in others an attitude of mind to do likewise. A man dedicated to religious pursuits must not be indifferent where aggression or tyranny is involved.

Having dealt with the concept of use of physical force and spiritualism we may analyse the equally relevant issue of correlation between Spiritualism and Politics. People in general believe that philosophy, religion and politics cannot see eye to eye with each other and those who ascribe political motives to Nanak's movement apparently labour under the view that spiritualists should never bother about mundane affairs and must remain immune from worldly material activity. They regard pursuit of self-realization as a task to be fulfilled in isolation from one's socio-political environment. Religious quest and spiritualism, being an inward exercise in perfection, has to remain indifferent to the state of society around it, and hence irrelevant to politics. According

[1]Cf. *Akal Ustat-Dasam Granth.*
[2]*Vachitter Natak*, XIII, p. 9.
[3]*Adi Granth*, Var Ramkali, p 903.

to this line of thought, political ideas are exclusively the preserve of political ideologues. In other words, concerns with state and politics are basically repugnant to religion.

This view is strongly countered by many thinkers and scholars according to whom religion covers one's whole life including one's position and relation to society and there can, hence, be no escape from religion even in politics. They view religion primarily as a system of values which must serve not only as an ideal but also as a practicable and achievable aim by man both in secular and spiritual aspects of life. According to Gurbachan Singh Talib, "the social political off-shoot of the ethico-spiritual vision of the dynamics of history is sustained by the fact that at the basis of most revolutions, in which the pampered ruling classes are over-thrown, is the man's sense of justice, expressed howsoever crudely and even barbarously. As man's indignation boils forth, comes an upheaval, scattering the apple cart of those who thought that their hour of pleasure and privilege would be prepetual."[1] Here it is interesting to recall that politics has, in fact, been defined by no less a philosopher than Aristotle "as a science that studies the supreme good for man."[2] Very much in line with Aristotle's ideas of politics, Dr. Gopal Singh points out that this supreme good involves happiness based on an ethical life, and that he who wants to live an ethical life must devote himself to politics and legislate measures for the happiness of the society. Politics is not the dirty game which the so-called politicians of any given time may understand or make it out to be but this is something "connected wholly with religion."[3] According to Ivor Brown, "Politics is but ethics writ large. Ethical society is incomplete without political theory, because man is an associated creature and cannot live fully in isolation; political theory is idle without ethical theory, because its study and its results depend fundamentally on our scheme of moral values, our conceptions of right and wrong."[4] In modern times, Mahatma Gandhi tried to prove this in his own life.

On the question of his entering politics Gandhi said, "To see the universal and a pervading spirit of truth face to face, one must be able to love the weakest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires for that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to truth has drawn me into the field of politics and I can say without the slightest hesitation, yet in all humility, that those who sav

[1]G.S. Talib, 'Guru Nanak's Vision of History', *Journal of Sikh* [illegible]
III, Spring 1980, p. 17.

[2]Cf. Sher Singh, *Philosophy of Sikhism*, p. 244.

[3]Dr. Gopal Singh, "Literature Must Lead Life", The *Hindustan* [illegible]
13.9.85.

[4]Cf. A.C. Kapoor, *Principles of Political Science*, p. 22.

that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means."[1] Mahatma Gandhi in fact was of the opinion that politics is as essential as religion.

In the context of medieval *bhakti*—Sufi milieu, Guru Nanak stands distinguished because he advanced a philosophy of life where the whole gamut of man's activities constitutes an indivisible whole. In the Sikh faith there is no contradiction between the acknowledgement of the Eternal and acceptance of physical reality because the "Sikh metaphysics recognizes the existential being of man as real as the creator himself and it is the recognition of life and world affirmation that provides ideational basis to the Sikh dynamism in the temporal domain." A study of Guru Nanak's important compositions in the *Adi Granth* i.e. Japji, Asa-di-var, Siddha Gosthi and Bara-Maha affirms his faith in the secular aspects of life and reveals the passions of a soul not only engaged in consciousness of the divine but also of a man highly sensitive to mundane and existential realities. Nanak in fact took a comprehensive view of man's multifarious faculties and social responsibilities, laid equal emphasis on the three spheres of life viz., religion, society and politics and sought to invest their virtues co-jointly in a single body of faith and conduct. Guru Nanak's socio-political concepts with metaphysical pre-suppositions distinguish him from other medieval *bhaktas* most of whom sought to make spiritual communion with God as the requisite pursuit to be carried in complete isolation.

Prior to Guru Nanak an accepted type of fatalistic attitude to life had been developed that prevented the emergence of a necessary vision or power to grapple with socio-political problems that had been caused by consolidated conquest of India by Islam. The political isolation of Hindu society was further strengthened by passive doses of Bhakti temper which provided ideological legitimization to political isolation of medieval Hindu society. The excessive emotional fervour of medieval Bhakti ideology, at times, ab-initio incapacitated man to rise and face socio-political challenges. Guru Nanak categorically switched to a spiritualist materialist philosophy in a new form which aimed at equipping man to live honourably in this world and meet socio-political challenges of life with spiritualism as its sheet anchor. Guru Nanak is perhaps, exceptional among medieval *bhaktas* for bringing in bold relief the brutality, corruption and inhuman conduct of the kings and their minions. In this context, it is also to be noted that not a single Sufi saint of Punjab, preceding or succeeding Guru Nanak considered, even as a metaphor, misdeeds and aggression of the rulers worth alluding too. The Sufis were rebels par excellence against traditionalism, ritualism

[1]M.K. Gandhi, *My Experiments with the Truth*, p. 383.

and priestly authoritarian of the medieval milieu in which they emerged, but perhaps their religious affinity with the state inhibited them from taking their revolt to the sphere of socio-political relations. In Guru Nanak, however, we find a fearless and forthright denunciation of the despotism and oppression of the Afghan rulers and corruption at all levels of administration. Guru Nanak regards corrupt political power as transient, sure to pass away beyond any hope of redemption. However, he does not attempt to take this line of argument any further than involving the wrath of God and prophesising the nemesis for tyrants and the ultimate supremacy of divine law of justice in the form of a just socio-political order. In fact, Guru Nanak's metaphysical vision has pronounced secular dimensions and his concept of socio-political transformation at the behest of the Truth, which is the substance of all morality, places him in a unique position in the medieval *bhakti*—sufi milieu.

We have by now dealt with, in a broad historical perspective, the subject of political dimensions of the teachings of Guru Nanak and the first four successor Gurus. The central point that emerges from the basic philosophy of Sikh Gurus is their bid to emancipate people from the shackles of ignorance, superstition, conventionalism, unauthentic living and to awaken the consciousness of people in favour of a rational existence and thus sow the seeds for sprouting a rational and fearless approach towards religious, social and political affairs. Guru Nanak did not provide legitimacy to the decadent institutionalism whether of the church or social order. The quality of fearlessness enabled the individual to meet the challenges of life squarely and the Sikh spirituality opened a broad vista of liberation from slavery both spiritual and temporal which was forced upon the people through a ruthless and authoritarian church and the state.

A characteristic feature of political awareness and outlook of the Sikh Guru is the nature of warnings held out by them in the name of Moral Law, of retribution which an inefficient, irresponsible, immoral and unjust ruler would have to suffer. Guru Nanak hinted at God's will in the downfall of the wicked. In a telling phrase Guru Nanak has referred to God as *Asur Sanghar*[1] destroyer of demons, i.e., the evil doers. This mode of apprehension of the Divine is in a way unique in the history of medieval religious thought. It was Guru Nanak who, with his prophetic vision of the stern realities operating on the human scene and the sovereignty of just retribution in the moral sphere, revived the ancient Indian concept of Divine Justice overtaking the evil doers. It is in this context that Guru Nanak has reflected on the

[1]*Adi Granth*, pp. 59, 224.

suffering of the Lodhis' as the inevitable penalty for their misrule and high-handedness.[1] The fourth Guru Ram Das and the fifth Guru Arjun spoke similarly of God's punishment befalling the immoral and tyrannical ruler. Guru Arjun Dev stated that "any one contemplating aggression on the weak and the poor shall, by the Lord be consumed in the fire of his wrath."[2]

Thus in the Sikh vision there is a political imperativeness of developing fearlessness, courage and absolute faith in the ultimate victory of good over evil. It is stated in the *Adi Granth*, "May I hold none in fear nor may I bow to fear of anybody."[3] In this condition no one submits to high-handedness and exploitation nor one has a chance to dominate others. Guru Arjun, reflecting on the socio-political implications of Guru Nanak's message stated, "The kind lord has given the commandment that none shall from now onwards dominate over others or cause tyranny. All would abide in peace and happiness. Thus shall be realized on earth a new polity of toleration and compassion."[4] At a time when the people were groaning under the heels of tyranny and injustice of the rulers and the spirit of freedom had been completely crushed in them, Guru Nanak projected a faith the cardinal principles of which were the equality of all human beings and their right to freedom from social and political oppression. Through his utterances, Guru Nanak aimed at preparing the ground for moral regeneration which could stimulate man's capacity for self assertion and mould such a human being as would not countenance inequality, injustice and slavery. All this encouraged the transformation of the Sikhs into crusaders and martyrs for causes where issues of conscience were involved. In fact, it is generally recognized that the latter reaction during Guru Gobind Singh by the followers of Guru Nanak could not possible have taken place in a vacuum of ideological conviction about the imperative need of a moral and just political order.

Some of the points which have emerged from our assessment of political dimensions of the Sikh Gurus teachings are: (i) Guru Nanak was very vocal on the contemporary political situations and as a true spiritualist felt deeply concerned about political disabilities of the people. He unmasked the evil of tyranny of the age and upbraided the rulers of the time for their injustice and failure to provide a good and protective rule. (ii) In consonance with his ideal that the world is a spiritual and moral orders i.e. *dharmsal*, the state is also construed by Nanak as an indispensable part of the overall moral order. Hence the

[1]Ibid., pp. 417-18.
[2]Ibid., p. 199.
[3]Ibid., p. 1427.
[4]Ibid., p. 78.

affairs of the state must be so conducted as to observe the ends of moral order. The rulers and those who administer justice are the physical embodiment of the Supreme Moral Law and their actions have to conform to the requirements of the law. (iii) The Sikh culture envisages kingship as a secular institution not of divine origin because the Sikh ethos posited the idea of true king—'Sacha Padshah', the title with which it invested its core concept of Godhead. "No kings measure upto the grandeur of God. Worldly kings hold their sway temporarily." It is important that Guru Nanak and subsequent Gurus had never given countenance to the doctrine of divine rights of the kings. (iv) The rulers must perform their functions as a mandate from God. Guru Nanak's assertions that only those were qualified to rule who were fit to do so[1] and that those who conferred authority on the undeserving were fools,[2] are quite significant in this context and even suggestive of the undeserving rulers forfeiting their right to rule. (v) Guru Nanak suggested the criteria which rulers and their subordinates should adopt in wielding power. Nanak struck what in modern connotation would be termed as a democratic idea, when he urged upon the monarch to rule with the help of representatives of people viz. 'Panchas', as this alone would make his rule long and lasting.[3] The rulers were enjoined upon to be dispensers of justice and not to exercise their authority arbitrarily. (vi) Guru Nanak and successor Gurus warned the rulers of retribution and chastisement in the event of their failure to ensure a just government and made the people conscious of their duty to secure a just rule for themselves.

To eradicate evils of enslavement, exploitation and encroachment of rights the Sikh Gurus repeatedly called upon their followers to the path of righteous endeavour which is the sure foundation of a just socio-political order.

In retrospect, it may be stated that Guru Nanak did not formally produce any treatise on politics nor did he systematically probe into the affairs of the state, and as such there is a widespread reluctance to recognize the link between his religious moral postulates on the one hand and political beliefs on the other. Our assessment of Guru Nanak's political thought, however, points towards a rather necessary connection between religion and politics as he understood. Like all great philosophers and metaphysicians, Guru Nanak seeks to present a total view of the reality vis-a-vis man. The world for Guru Nanak is anthropocentric and his notions of society and polity were derived from his concept of the Truth which is the substance of all morality. His socio-political

[1]Ibid., p. 1039.
[2]Ibid., p. 1286.
[3]Ibid., p. 992.

concerns were the offshoot of religion preached by him and these were closely related to his ideals of a society and polity based on the healthy basis of justice, liberty, equality, freedom from fear and above all, on the foundations of rationalism. In other words, Guru Nanak was out to spiritualize and moralize politics and wanted to establish that a proper social and political behaviour should result from one's religious and moral commitment. In this context, it would, hence be apt to recognize the politically educative values, even though nebulous or incipient, in the teachings of Guru Nanak. It is, however, necessary to underscore the point that while having made observations and projected concepts of considerable social and political import, Guru Nanak and the successor Gurus were primarily religious teachers and preachers. Active politics was not their concern nor did they have any political mission as such. There is no documentary or other authentic evidence to support any such imputation. Whatever indications of political awareness, we find in Guru Nanak's sayings is a by product and extension of his spirituo-social beliefs. Even though God remained the first and last word in Guru Nanak's hymns and the quantum of religious sentiments outweighs the secular in terms of theme and thought, yet the essence of religion, according to Guru Nanak, consists in its being an instrument for human welfare and social justice.

Guru Nanak's immediate concern was to develop the potentialities of man and to equip him with moral and intellectual force so that he could qualify himself for succour from God at moments of crisis in life. Through his forthright and fearless denunciation of all forms of oppression and tyranny, he symbolized the right of man to freedom of expression. The most important act of Nanak in grooming the society lay in his promoting capacity for thinking freely and independently. Nanak also infused courage and moral strength among the people by upholding the Divine law of Justice and its ultimate supremacy in the form of establishment of a just socio-political order. This was indeed his vision and it subsequently found vindication both in the conviction and practice of his followers and of which resistance to injustice and tyranny of the rulers constituted only a logical course of action. The basic framework provided by Guru Nanak and his immediate four successors acted as a source of inspiration and guidance to the Sikh *panth* during the subsequent centuries and before the eighteenth century a framework of political ideals had already taken shape.

In the end, it would be apt to record that ultimately it is not just the greatness of the founder of a faith that matters but how much of what he preached has become the way of life of his followers. To that extent it is a tribute to Guru Nanak that his message which was based partly on the rejection of formalism and feudalistic values and partly on the fact that philosophical enquiries are necessary for preparing the

mind towards the acceptance of an ideal socio-religious discipline, was destined to live through centuries and provide inspiration to the Sikh community established by him.

Before closing this treatise it would be necessary to emphasize that the teachings of the Sikh Gurus were not conceived for a specific community of their followers. Rather they intended to inspire all. They projected a vision of common humanity which would overcome the barriers and discriminations based on racial or ethnic differences. In Guru Nanak's philosophy there is an open acceptance of cultural pluralism and he reminded the people of their essential oneness, advised men of all faiths and denominations to look beyond cultural divisions and distinctions to the fundamental unity of mankind. In fact, a healthy and virile religion like Sikhism, enshrined in the teachings of Guru Nanak which underscore the doctrines of universal brotherhood, social justice, righteousness of conduct and truthful simple living, can well act for all times as a beacon light for the mankind as a whole. In the present world while there is tremendous progress in terms of material attainments, it is being increasingly realized that the full benefit of material abundance is not reaching the common man because of the increasingly exploitative nature of man, a trait which is traceable by one and all to the progressive evaporation of moral values from the present scene. Judged from this angle, Guru Nanak may be credited with having done yeoman service to the entire humanity by stipulating the need for adherence to fundamental values of human conduct and social justice without which the material achievement would become meaningless. Guru Nanak's religious vision envisages inter-relatedness of the existential with the transcendental and this integral unity is not derived from any theoretical conceptualization but is born out of his realization of the spiritual foundations of human existence. Unity between knowledge, faith and practice which motivates holistic, harmonious and enlightened living can help in the discovery of the foundations of a new spiritual fellowship of man that would ensure universal brotherhood and world peace. And herein lies the relevance of Guru Nanak's teachings in the present times and the significance of his approach which aims at linking all aspects of human activity including that in social and political arenas with the concept of *dharma*.

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